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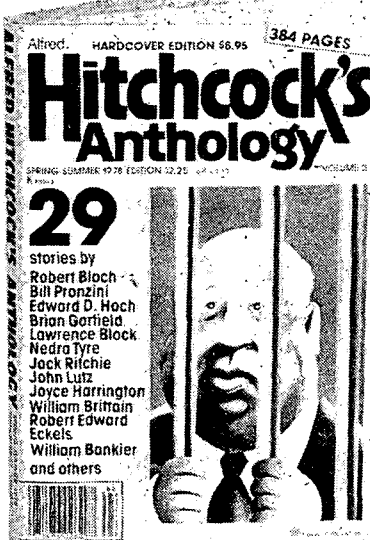
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SUSPENSE

VOLUME 23, NO. 1 JANUARY 1978

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HITCHCOCK'S
MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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JAN. 12

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January 1978

Dear Reader:

I know from our long association that you believe in starting the new year right, and this shiny new issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine*, the first of this shiny new year, should give you a fine head start in that di-

rection.

In the twelve stories we offer you this month you'll find murder in almost every conceivable degree, including zero centigrade (see Stephen Wasylyk's "The Transparency"). Included too are a slight case of kidnapping and a soupçon of larceny (a soupçon—that's what we cooks say).

But before you dig in, let me call your special attention to a story that begins on page 70—in which a movie director is on trial for his life, accused of the murder of an unkind film critic. I found it terrifying.

Good reading.

Alfred Hitchcock

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Royce Arnstetter's birthday fell on the fourth of March, same as it did every year . . .

CHANGE OF LIFE

by
LAWRENCE
BLOCK



In a sense, what happened to Royce Arnstetter wasn't the most unusual thing in the world. What happened to him was that he got to be thirty-eight years old. That's something that happens to most people and it isn't usually such a much, just a little way-station on the road of life, a milepost precisely halfway between thirty-two and forty-four, say.

Not the most significant milestone in the world for most of us either.

Since the good Lord saw fit to equip the vast majority of us with ten fingers, we're apt to attach more significance to those birthdays than end with a nought. Oh, there are a few other biggies—eighteen, twenty-one, sixty-five—but usually it's hitting thirty or forty or fifty that makes a man stop and take stock of his life.

For Royce Arnstetter it was old number thirty-eight. The night before he'd gone to bed around ten o'clock—he just about always went to bed around ten o'clock—and his wife Essie said, "Well, when you wake up you'll be thirty-eight, Royce."

"Sure will," he said.

Whereupon she turned out the light and went back to the living room to watch a rerun of *Heellaw* and Royce rolled over and went to sleep. Fell right off to sleep too. He never did have any trouble doing that.

Then just about exactly eight hours later he opened his eyes and he was thirty-eight years old. He got out of bed quietly, careful not to wake Essie, and he went into the bathroom and studied his face as a prelude to shaving it.

"Be double damned," he said. "Thirty-eight years old and my life's half over and I never yet did a single thing."

While it is given to relatively few men to know in advance the precise dates of their death, a perhaps surprising number of them think they know. Some work it out actuarially with slide rules. Some dream their obituaries and note the date on the newspaper. Others draw their conclusions by means of palmistry or phrenology or astrology or numerology or some such. (Royce's birthday, that we've been talking about, fell on the fourth of March that year, same as it did every year. That made him a Pisces, and he had Taurus rising, Moon in Leo, Venus in Capricorn, Mars in Taurus, and just a shade over three hundred dollars in the First National Bank of Schuyler County. He knew about the bank account but not about the astrology business. I'm just putting it in in case you care. He had lines on the palms of his hands and bumps on the top of his head, but he'd never taken any particular note of them, so I don't see why you and I have to.)

It's hard to say why Royce had decided he'd live to be seventy-six years old. The ages of his four grandparents at death added up to two hundred and ninety-seven, and if you divide that by four (which I just took the trouble to do for you) you come up with seventy-four and a

quarter change. Royce's pa was still hale and hearty at sixty-three, and his ma had died some years back at fifty-one during an electric storm when a light-struck old silver maple fell on her car while she was in it.

Royce was an only child.

Point is, you can juggle numbers until you're blue in the face and get about everything but seventy-six in connection with Royce Arnstetter. Maybe he dreamed the number, or maybe he saw *The Music Man* and counted trombones, or maybe he was hung up on the Declaration of Independence.

Point is, it hardly matters why Royce had this idea in his head. But he had it, and he'd had it for as many years as he could remember. If you could divide seventy-six by three he might have had a bad morning some years earlier, and if he'd picked seventy-five or seventy-seven he might have skipped right on by the problem entirely, but he picked seventy-six and even Royce knew that half of seventy-six was thirty-eight, which was what he was.

He had what the French, who have a way with words, call an *idée fixe*. If you went and called it a fixed idea you wouldn't go far wrong. And you know what they say about the power of a fixed idea whose time has come.

Or maybe you don't, but it doesn't matter much. Let's get on back to Royce, still staring at himself in the mirror. What he did was fairly usual. He lathered up and started shaving.

But this time, when he had shaved precisely half of his face, one side of his neck and one cheek and one half of his chin and one half of his mustache, he plumb stopped and washed off the rest of the lather.

"Half done," he said, "and half to go."

He looked pretty silly, if you want to know.

Now I almost said earlier that the only thing noteworthy about the number thirty-eight, unless you happen to be Royce Arnstetter, is that it's the calibre of a gun. That would have had a nice ironical sound to it, at least the first time I ran it on by you, but the thing is it would be a fairly pointless observation. Only time Royce ever handled a pistol in his whole life was when he put in his six months in the National Guard so as not to go into the Army, and what they had there was a forty-five automatic, and he never did fire it.

As far as owning guns, Royce had a pretty nice rim-fire .22 rifle. It

was a pretty fair piece of steel in its day and Royce's pa used to keep it around as a varmint gun. That was before Royce married Essie Handridge and took a place on the edge of town; and Royce used to sit up in his bedroom with the rifle and plink away at woodchucks and rabbits when they made a pass at his ma's snap beans and lettuce and such. He didn't often hit anything. It was his pa's gun, really, and it was only in Royce's keeping because his Pa had taken to drinking some after Royce's ma got crushed by the silver maple. "Shot out a whole raft of windows last Friday and don't even recall it," Royce's pa said. "Now why don't you just hold onto this here for me? I got enough to worry about as it is."

Royce kep' the gun in the closet. He didn't even keep any bullets for it, because what did he need with them?

The other gun was a Worthington twelve gauge, which is a shotgun of a more or less all-purpose nature. Royce's was double-barrel, side by side, and there was nothing automatic about it. After you fired off both shells you had to stop and open the gun and take out the old shells and slap in a couple of fresh ones. Once or twice a year Royce would go out the first day of small-game season and try to get himself a rabbit or a couple pheasant. Sometimes he did and sometimes not. And every now and then he'd try for a deer, but he never did get one of them. Deer have been thin in this part of the state since a few years after the war.

So basically Royce wasn't much for guns. What he really preferred was fishing, which was something he was tolerably good at. His pa was always a good fisherman and it was about the only thing the two of them enjoyed doing together. Royce wasn't enough of a nut to tie his own flies, which his pa had done now and then, but he could cast and he knew what bait to use for what fish and all the usual garbage fishermen have to know if they expect to do themselves any good. He knew all that stuff, Royce did, and he took double-good care of his fishing tackle and owned nothing but quality gear. Some of it was bought second-hand but it was all quality merchandise and he kept it in the best kind of shape.

But good as he was with a fishing rod and poor as he might be with a gun, it didn't make no nevermind, because how in blue hell are you going to walk into a bank and hold it up with a fly rod?

Be serious, will you now?

Well, Royce was there at **twenty** minutes past nine, which was eleven minutes after the bank opened, which in turn was nine minutes after it was supposed to open. It's not only the First National Bank of Schuyler County, it's the only bank, national or otherwise, in the county. So if Buford Washburn's a handful of minutes late opening up, nobody's about to take his business across the street, because across the street's nothing but Eddie Joe Tyler's sporting goods store. (Royce bought most of his fishing tackle from Eddie Joe, except for the Greenbriar reel he bought when they auctioned off George McEwan's leavings. His pa bought the Worthington shotgun years ago in Clay County off a man who advertised it in the *Clay County Weekly Republican*. I don't know what-all that has to do with anything, but the shotgun's important because Royce had it on his shoulder when he walked on into the bank.)

There was only the one teller behind the counter, but then there was only Royce to give her any business. Buford Washburn was at his desk along the side, and he got to his feet when he saw Royce. "Well, say there, Royce," he said.

"Say, Mr. Washburn," said Royce.

Buford sat back down again. He didn't stand more than he had to. He was maybe six, seven years older than Royce, but if he lived to be seventy-six it would be a miracle, being as his blood pressure was high as July corn and his belt measured fifty-two inches even if you soaked it in brine. Plus he drank. Never before dinner, but that leaves you a whole lot of hours if you're a night person.

The teller was Ruth Van Dine. Her ma wanted her to get braces when she was twelve, thirteen, but Ruth said she didn't care to. I'd have to call that a big mistake on her part. "Say there, Royce," she said. "What can I do for you?"

Now Royce shoved his savings passbook across the top of the counter. Don't ask me why he brought the blame thing. I couldn't tell you.

"Deposit?"

"Withdrawal."

"How much?"

Every dang old cent you got in **this** here bank was what he was going to say. But what came out of his mouth was, "Every dang old cent."

"Three hundred twelve dollars and forty-five cents? Plus I guess you

got some extra interest coming which I'll figure out for you."

"Well—"

"Better make out a slip, Royce. Just on behind you?"

He turned to look for the withdrawal slips and there was Buford Washburn, also standing. "They off at the sawmill today, Royce? I didn't hear anything."

"No, I guess they're workin', Mr. Washburn. I guess I took the day."

"Can't blame you, beautiful day like this. What'd you do, go and get a little hunting in?"

"Not in March, Mr. Washburn."

"I don't guess nothing's in season this time of year."

"Not a thing. I was just gone take this here across to Eddie Joe. Needs a little gunsmithin'."

"Well, they say Eddie Joe knows his stuff."

"I guess he does, Mr. Washburn."

"Now this about drawing out all your money," Buford said. He fancied himself smoother than a bald tire at getting from small talk to business, Buford did. "I guess you got what they call an emergency."

"Somethin' like."

"Well now, maybe you want to do what most folks do, and that's leave a few dollars in to keep the account open. Just for convenience. Say ten dollars? Or just draw a round amount, say you draw your three hundred dollars. Or—" And he went through a whole routine about how Royce could take his old self a passbook loan and keep the account together and keep earning interest and all the rest of it, which I'm not going to spell out here for you.

Upshot of it was Royce wound up drawing three hundred dollars. Ruth Van Dine gave it to him in tens and twenties because he just stood there stiffer than new rope when she asked him how did he want it. Three times she asked him, and she's a girl no one ever had to tell to speak up, and each time it was like talking to a wall, so she counted out ten tens and ten twenties and gave it to him, along with his passbook. He thanked her and walked out with the passbook and money in one hand and the other holding the twelve gauge Worthington, which was still propped up on his shoulder.

Before he got back in his panel truck he said, "Half my life, Lord, half my dang life."

Then he got in the truck.

When he got back to his house he found Essie in the kitchen soaking the labels off some empty jam jars. She turned and saw him, then shut off the faucet and turned to look at him again. She said, "Why, Royce honey, what are you doing back here? Did you forget somethin'?"

"I didn't forget nothin'," he said. What he forgot was to hold up the bank like he'd set out to do, but he didn't mention that.

"You didn't get laid off," she said mournfully. (I didn't put in a question mark there because her voice didn't turn up at the end. She said it sort of like it would be O.K. if Royce did get laid off from the saw-mill, being that the both of them could always go out in the backyard and eat dirt. She was always a comfort, Essie was.)

"Didn't go to work," Royce said. "Today's my dang birthday," Royce said.

"Course it is! Now I never wished you a happy birthday but you left fore I was out of bed. Well, happy birthday and many more. Thirty-nine years, land sakes."

"Thirty-eight!"

"What did I say? Why, I said thirty-nine. Would you believe that. I know it's thirty-eight, 'course I know that. Why are you carrying that gun, I guess there's rats in the garbage again."

"Half my life," Royce said.

"Is there?"

"Is there what?"

"Rats in the garbage again?"

"Now how in blue hell would I know-is there rats in the garbage?"

"But you have that gun, Royce."

He discovered the gun, took it off his shoulder, and held it out in both hands, looking at it like it was the prettiest thing since a new calf.

"That's your shotgun," Essie said.

"Well, I guess I know that. Half my dang life."

"What about half your life?"

"My life's half gone," he said, "and what did I ever do with it, would you tell me that? Far as I ever been from home is Franklin County and I never stayed there overnight, just went and come back. Half my life and I never left the dang old state."

"I was thinkin' we might run out to Silver Dollar City this summer," Essie said. "It's like an old frontier city come to life or so they say. That's across the state line, come to think on it."

"Never been anyplace, never done any dang thing. Never had no woman but you."

"Well now."

"I'm gone to Paris," Royce said.

"What did you say?"

"I'm gone to Paris is what I said. I'm gone rob Buford Washburn's bank and I'm not even gone call him Mr. Washburn this time. Gone to Paris France, gone buy a Cadillac big as a train, gone do every dang thing I never did. Half my life, Essie."

Well, she frowned. You blame her? "Royce," she said, "you better lie down."

"Paris France."

"What I'll do," she said, "I'll just call on over at Dr. LeBeau's. You lie down and put the fan on and I'll just finish with these here jars and then call the doctor. You know something? Just two more cases and we'll run out of your ma's plum preserves. Two cases of twenty-four jars to the case is forty-eight jars and we'll be out. Now I never thought we'd be out of them plums she put up but we'll be plumb out, won't we. Hear me talk, plumb out of plums, I did that without even thinking."

Essie wasn't normally quite this scatter-brained. Almost, but not quite. Thing is, she was concerned about Royce, being as he wasn't acting himself.

"Problem is getting in a rut," Royce said. He was talking to his own self now, not to Essie. "Problem is you leave yourself openings and you back down because it's the easy thing to do. Like in the bank."

"Royce, ain't you goin' to lay down?"

"Fillin' out a dang slip," Royce said.

"Royce? You know somethin'? You did the funniest thing this mornin', honey. You know what you did? You went and you only shaved the half of your face. You shaved the one half and you didn't shave the other half."

(Now this is something that both Ruth Van Dine and Buford Washburn had already observed, and truth to tell they had both called it to Royce's attention—in a friendly way, of course. I'd have mentioned it but I figured if I kept sliding in the same little piece of conversation over and over it'd be about as interesting for you as watching paint dry. But I had to mention when Essie said it out of respect, see,

because it was the last words that woman ever got to speak, because right after she said it Royce stuck the shotgun right in her face and fired off one of the barrels. Don't ask me which one.)

"Now the only way to go is forward," Royce said. "Fix things so you got no bolt hole and you got to do what you got to do." He went to the cupboard, got a shotgun shell, broke open the gun, dug out the empty casing, popped in the new shell, and closed the gun up again.

On the way out of the door he looked at Essie and said, "You weren't so bad, I don't guess."

Well, Royce drove on back to the bank and parked directly in front of it, even though there's a sign says plainly not to, and he stepped on into that bank with the twelve-gauge clenched in his hand. It wasn't over his shoulder this time. He had his right hand wrapped around the barrel at the center of gravity or close to it. (It's not the worst way to carry a gun, though you'll never see it advocated during a gun safety drive.)

He was asked later if he felt remorse at that time about Essie. It was the sort of dumb question they ask you, and it was especially dumb in light of the fact that Royce probably didn't know what the hell remorse meant, but in plain truth he didn't. What he felt was in motion.

And in that sense he felt pretty fine. Because he'd been standing plumb still for thirty-eight years and never even knew it, and now he was in motion, and it hardly mattered where exactly he was going.

"I want every dang cent in this bank!" he sang out, and Buford Washburn just about popped a blood vessel in his right eye, and Ruth Van Dine stared, and old Miz Cristendahl who had made a trip to town just to get the interest credited to her account just stood there and closed her eyes so nothing bad would happen to her. (I guess it worked pretty good. That woman's still alive, and she was seventy-six years old when Calvin Coolidge didn't choose to run. All those Cristendahls live pretty close to forever. Good thing they're not much for breeding or the planet would be armpit deep in Cristendahls.)

"Now you give me every bit of that money," he said to Ruth. And he kept saying it, and she got rattled.

"I can't," she said finally, "because anyway it's not mine to give and I got no authority and besides there's another customer ahead of you. What you got to do is you got to speak to Mr. Buford Washburn."

And what Buford said was, "Now, Royce, say, Royce, you want to put down that gun."

"I'm gone to Paris France, Mr. Washburn." You notice he forgot and went and called him Mr. Washburn. Old habits die hard.

"Royce, you still didn't finish your morning shave. What's got into you, boy?"

"I killed my wife, Mr. Washburn."

"Royce, why don't you just have a seat and I'll get you a cold glass of Royal Crown. Take my chair."

So Royce pointed the gun at him. "You better give me that money," he said, "or I could go and blow your dang head off your dumb shoulder."

"Boy, does your pappy have the slightest idea what you're up to?"

"I don't see what my pa's got to do with this."

"Because your pappy, he wouldn't take kindly to you carrying on this way, Royce. Now just sit down in my chair, you hear?"

At this point Royce was getting riled, plus he was feeling the frustration of it. Here he went and burned his britches by shooting Essie and where was he? Still trying to hold up a bank that wouldn't take him seriously. So what he did, he swung the gun around and shot out the plate-glass window. You wouldn't think the world would make that much noise in the course of coming to an end.

"Well, now you went and did it," Buford told him. "You got the slightest idea what a plate-glass window costs? Royce, boy, you went and bought yourself a peck of trouble."

So what Royce did, he shot Ruth Van Dine.

Now that doesn't sound like it makes a whole vast amount of sense, but Royce had his reasons, if you want to go and call them by that name. He couldn't kill Buford, according to his thinking, because Buford was the only one who could authorize giving him the money. And he didn't think to shoot Miz Cristendahl because he didn't notice her. (Maybe because she closed her eyes. Maybe those ostriches know what they're about. I'm not going to say they don't.)

On top of which Ruth was screaming a good bit and it was getting on Royce's nerves.

He wasn't any Dead-Eye Dick, as I may have pointed out before, and although he was standing right close to Ruth he didn't get a very good shot at her. A twelve gauge casts a pretty tight pattern as close as

he was to her, with most of the charge going right over her head. There was enough left to do the job, but it was close for a while. Didn't kill her right off, left them plenty of time to rush her to Schuyler County Memorial and pop her into the operating room. It was six hours after that before she died, and there's some say better doctors could have saved her. That's a question I'll stay away from myself. It's said she'd of been a vegetable even if she lived, so maybe it's all for the best.

Well, that was about the size of it. Buford fainted, which was plain sensible on his part, and Miz Cristendahl stood around with her eyes shut and her fingers in her ears, and Royce Arnstetter went behind the counter and opened the cash drawer and started pulling out stacks of money. He got all the money on top of the counter. There wasn't a whole hell of a lot of it. He was looking for a bag to put it in when a couple of citizens rushed in to see what was going on.

He picked up the gun and then just threw it down in disgust because it was full of nothing but two spent shells. And he couldn't have reloaded if he'd thought of it because he never did bring along any extra shells when he left the house. Just the two that were loaded into the gun, and one of those took out the window and the other took out poor Ruth. He just threw the gun down and said a couple bad words and thought what a mess he'd made of everything, letting the first half of his life just dribble out and then screwing up the second half on the very first day of it.

He would of pleaded at the trial but he had this young court-appointed lawyer who wanted to do some showboating, and the upshot of it was he wound up drawing ninety-nine-to-life, which sounds backwards to me, as the average life runs out way in front of the ninety-nine mark, especially when you're thirty-eight to start with.

He's in the state prison now over to Millersport. It's not quite as far from his home as Franklin County where he went once, but he didn't get to stay overnight that time. He sure gets to stay overnight now.

Well, there's people to talk to and he's learning things. His pa's been to visit a few times. They don't have much to say to each other but when did they ever? They'll reminisce about times they went fishing. It's not so bad.

He thinks about Essie now and then. I don't know as you'd call it remorse though.

"Be here until the day I die," he said one day. And a fellow inmate sat him down and told him about parole and time off for good behavior and a host of other things, and this fellow worked it out with pencil and paper and told Royce he'd likely be breathing free air in something like thirty-three years.

"Means I'll have five left to myself," Royce said.

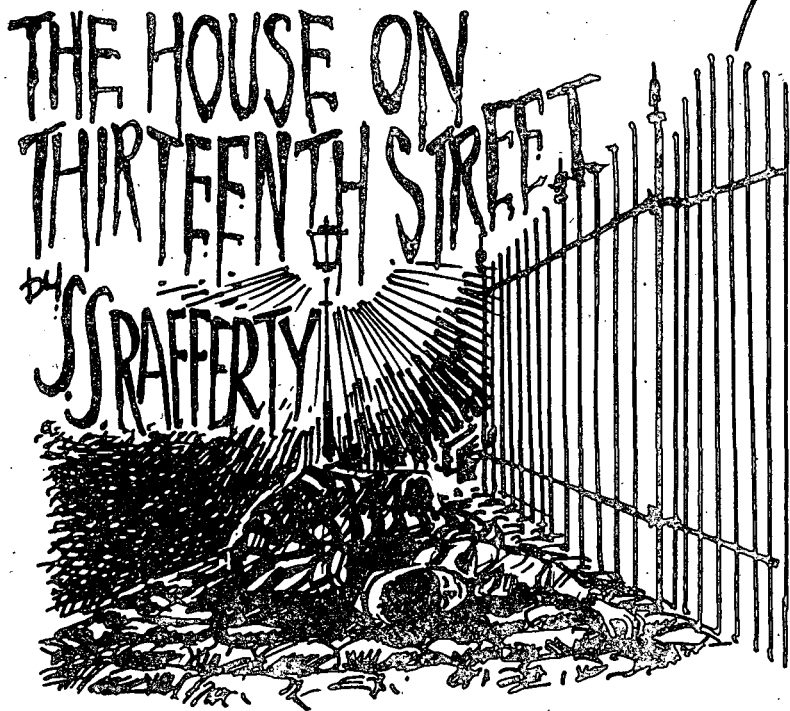
The fellow gave him this look.

"I'm fixin' to live until I'm seventy-six," Royce explained. "Thirty-eight now and thirty-three more in here is what? Seventy-one, isn't it? Seventy-six take away seventy-one and you get five, don't you? Five years left when I'm out of here." And he scratched his head and said, "Now what am I gone do with them five years?"

Well, I just guess he'll have to think of something.



The people who lived there were a curious lot . . .



While the waitress placed the cups, plates, and teapot on the table, Thomas Wynne took respite in the momentary silence in the conversation with his wife. He gazed across the tiny tearoom and looked out through the windowpane at Fourteenth Street. He was surprised to see, between the darting hansom cabs and commercial wagons, a lamplighter torching the streetlight gas jets. He hadn't realized it was so late in the afternoon. He instinctively took his watch from his

waistcoat, saw it was close to six o'clock, and grumbled through his moustache.

"A little late for tea, Maude," he said when the waitress had left them alone.

His wife poured and passed as if she hadn't heard him.

"Now we can move in immediately, so I don't see any problems. Try the cucumber sandwiches, dear." Maude Wynne was no more than twenty-three, and a bride of two years, but she handled herself and her husband with matronly firmness. Actually, she would have been marking her seventh year of marriage had not the war taken Tom away to fight in the South for so long. When they thought he was dead, she vowed to remain a spinster, and then, miraculously, he turned up alive. If she mothered him too much, she felt it was her duty after all he had been through.

"It's really too far uptown, you know," he said, munching the wafer-thin sandwich. "I'll be spending half my life on the horse cars."

"How you exaggerate, Thomas Wynne! It's twenty minutes from here to Wall Street. Land sakes, we can't spend the rest of our lives in a hotel."

The Wynnes had been in New York three weeks now, Tom having been transferred by the bank from the Chicago office. Maude had scoured the city for a decent flat and finally found what she wanted on Thirteenth Street just off Fifth Avenue. It was a delightful third-story, floor-through flat with all the modern conveniences one could imagine—indoor plumbing, newly laid gas, and a kitchen with a mahogany icebox. She loved it and she knew her husband was just being peckish.

"People back home will think we're living in a stable when we tell them our address is Copley Mews."

"Well, it's not a stable and never has been. It's just the fashion to call houses set back from the street 'mews.' Eat another sandwich, dear."

He took one obediently from the tray.

"Besides, 'mews' doesn't mean stable—mews were where royalty kept their hunting hawks." Her tone suddenly changed to helpless frustration.

"I've looked at dozens of places, Tom, and believe-you-me, nothing matches Copley Mews. It has everything!"

She knew it didn't have quite *everything*, but they *had* to move, and Maude was hopeful that Copley Mews would suit their peculiar needs. He leaned forward across the table and touched her husband's hand.

"I'd really like it, Tom."

He looked at her, his steel-grey eyes softening. He was only twenty-eight years old, but his lined face gave him a much older appearance. When he went to war, he had been boyishly handsome in his blue and brass. Now his features were hard, almost brittle with age.

"All right, Maude," he said.

That was Tuesday. They moved in on Thursday, and the murders began on Friday.

Of all the twenty-four penny papers in the city, the *New York Standard*'s report was the most accurate and least garish. While the others were suggesting that monsters and madmen were lurking, knife in hand, on every-byway, the *Standard* quite sensibly reported that a certain Dora Rooney had met death at the hands of an unknown ruffian in Thirteenth Street just a few paces from the front gates of Copley Mews. The mention of the Mews was, to say the least, most disconcerting to Miss Nellie Adams, who shared ownership of the building with her bachelor brother, Tremont. The Adamses were in their sixties, and fraternal twins. Their grandfather, Gordon Copley, had built the Mews as a townhouse in the 1790s, and the brother and sister had been raised there. When, as Miss Nellie put it, "the slavers started that god-awful war," they were forced by dint of losses in cotton futures to cut the old house up into flats. The twins occupied the second floor because Nellie had always liked the green velvet walls of the front room.

Above them was the new couple, the Wynnes, from the Midwest. On the top story was the haberdasher, Joshua Gorshin, who owned a small shop near Rectors. The ground floor was rented to Dr. Amos Phillips, the young fellow who didn't look like a professor but was just the same, and taught up at the College of Physicians and Surgeons.

"I think it's a frightful invasion of our privacy," she said to her brother, who sat dozing in his wheeled chair. Tremont Adams was crippled by a muscular disease in the eyes of the world, but to Nellie, although she never let it cross her mind, his affliction was actually the

French affliction contracted in his youth and ignored far beyond cure. The reason Dr. Phipps paid only \$2-a-month rent was his availability for the daily mercury treatments.

"What, Nell?" her brother asked.

"Some chit of a girl gets herself stabbed on our front walk and now we'll have gawkers day and night. Don't know what *that* type of woman was doing in this neighborhood anyway. Hotel chambermaid, the article says. Sounds like a touch of sassafras to me. What kind of woman would work in a hotel, a commercial hotel at that, with drummers and all sorts of riffraff coming and going?"

As she talked she crossed the sitting room and parted the lace curtains a crack. "There," she announced. "Gawkers all over the front walk."

The Mews was separated from the street by thirty feet of cobbled patio and guarded by an eight-foot iron fence and a double gate. "It must be close on five," she went on. "Here comes Mr. Gorshin, regular as—" She glanced over her shoulder and saw that Tremont was asleep. "Tremont, dear," she said, "you mustn't doze off now or you'll never sleep tonight, and you know how restless you get."

He grumbled, "I was just resting my eyes. What were you saying?"

"I was saying how regular poor Mr. Gorshin is, like he was on a timetable. Drinkers are usually so unreliable."

"Who says he's a drinker? I've never seen him stagger."

"Oh, he's a tippler, all right. I can tell. Why, there are times when his hands shake so badly I think they'll fall off." She turned back to the window and waved to Mr. Gorshin as he mounted the steps. He was a middle-aged man, and on the short side. His muttonchop sideburns gave the initial impression that he was corpulent. He was, however, a compactly built man and always well dressed. He tipped his felt hat to his landlady and entered the building.

"Damned old snoop," he muttered to himself as his trembling hand struggled to fit his latchkey into the lock.

"No, Captain Fenley, I saw nothing last night on the street," Dr. Amos Phipps said from behind his paper-strewn desk. He and the police officer were in the front room of his ground-floor flat. It served as his office, his den, and, when he often worked far into the night, his makeshift bedroom, the old faded couch serving for a bed.

Dr. Phipps, despite Miss Adams's observation, *was* old enough to be professor. He was thirty-eight but clean-shaven and blond, which made him seem youthful compared to the traditionally bearded professional men of the city.

"As you can see, Captain," he said, waving a hand toward the front wall, "my windows are heavily draped."

"So I see. It's a shame she wasn't found sooner with a doctor so close at hand."

"If the newspapers are to be believed, and they often aren't, her throat was slashed. If the jugular was severed, she was dead on the spot."

"Yes, I saw a lot of that in the war. Bayonets are fierce weapons. I suppose you did too."

"I wasn't in the war, Captain. I was in Europe."

"I was at Bull Run. Came out a major. Well, I'm asking everyone in the neighborhood on the chance that they happened to be looking out their windows last night."

"I take it there is a paucity of clues."

"He took the knife with him. I figure it must be someone from the hotel where she worked—possibly a guest at one time or another. She might have gotten mixed up with some musician and crossed him. It's going to be a devil of a job tracing all those guests, I can tell you."

"Would a lover kill her on a public street, Captain? It seems far-fetched."

"Do you have any theories, Doctor? I'm not above suggestions."

"No, but it seems to me, since you've ruled out robbery and sexual attack, that you're up a stump. It would be impossible to check every person who ever stayed at the hotel. You may just have a perfect murder on your hands."

The newspapers soon lost interest in the death of an obscure chambermaid. Captain Fenley, having exhausted all practical avenues of investigation, considered the death of Dora Rooney to have been committed by person or persons unknown, and put the case aside. Then, three weeks later, a housemaid named Nancy Briggs also met a mid-night death on Thirteenth Street.

"Slasher Strikes Again!" The Commissioner read the headline aloud and glared. "Same place! Same method! Good Lord, Fenley!"

"Yes, sir, I have every available man on it. There is one interesting development, but it's delicate."

"Damn delicacy, Fenley. We need action."

"I agree, sir. But I believe the killer lives on Thirteenth Street."

The Commissioner's bushy eyebrows raised in surprise.

"Delicate indeed, Fenley. That's a fashionable neighborhood."

"Yes, sir, but certain facts point to it. Actually, to one block between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. On the night of the second slaying, two of our patrolmen were on post in the area. One, a supernumerary named Clancy, was proceeding down Sixth toward the corner of Thirteenth. At the same time, Officer Dean was on Fifth near Thirteenth. Neither officer saw anyone leave that block nor encountered anyone when they turned into Thirteenth Street from opposite ends. It stands to reason that the killer took refuge in one of the houses."

"Or was hiding."

"Possibly, but the area was immediately flooded with police after Clancy found the body, making it difficult for anyone to slip out unnoticed."

"How many houses in that block?"

"On both sides, twenty-two, Mister Commissioner. But I have a special interest in one dwelling—Copley Mews."

"Because the murders occurred at its gates?"

"Partly, but also because the occupants are a curious lot."

"How so?"

"There are three bachelors living in the house, although one is confined to a wheeled chair."

"Bachelors? I don't understand."

"If you accept the view that the girls were just walking in the street and were struck down by a stranger, a madman, it means nothing. But let us suppose that those women were known to one of the men in the building. Suppose the girls were secretly visiting there."

"Dear me." The Commissioner pondered. "That thickens it. Any one of these men strike you in particular?"

"No, although this Dr. Phipps interests me. He's quartered on the first floor and has the easiest access to the street. A doctor would know how to kill quickly and efficiently."

"He'd have to be a madman to keep dumping corpses at his own doorstep—"

"Sir, I think one of them is a madman, and I'm going to concentrate my investigation on them."

"Very well," his superior said, "but be cautious. You seem to have discounted the Leipzig information."

Fenley gave a half smile. "That Leipzig street stabber last year? Why not the Boston slasher back in '29, sir? If we work from that direction, sir, we will dilute our effectiveness."

"Be your own guide. But the way they're letting all this trash into the country, I wouldn't be surprised if we had imported a madman or two. This Leipzig data is strictly confidential, mind. Heaven forbid the penny press should get hold of it. We'd have lynchings on our hands."

Fenley got to his feet, gave a halfhearted salute, and left. In the corridor he shook his head in disgust. Politically appointed amateurs were bad enough, but when they were isolationists as well . . .

On his way uptown, Fenley stopped at the haberdashery of Joshua Gorshin, the fourth-floor tenant at Copley Mews. The shop was small and tidy, offering a modest line of ready-to-wear suits, shirts, collars, cuffs, belts, socks, and somber cravats. The main offering seemed to be hats.

"Oh, yes, Captain Fenley," Gorshin said when the clerk summoned him from the back workrooms. "It's most terrible, this happening again."

Fenley observed the man carefully. Thanks to the garrulous Miss Adams, he knew of his drinking problem, but to his experienced policeman's eye Gorshin did not look the type to go mad with strong spirits.

Fenley picked up a grey felt hat from the counter. The action had an upsetting effect on the shopkeeper. He quickly took the hat from Fenley's hands and smoothed its brim with his coat sleeve. "I'm sorry, Captain, but it's custom-made for one of my best customers," he explained.

"Sorry," Fenley apologized.

"I have a few factory-mades on the shelves if you're interested."

"No, the one I wear is fine. You say you arrived home last night at 7 P.M. According to your landlady, that was late for you."

Gorshin chuckled. "She is a bit of a nosy Parker. I took inventory last night with my clerk, and then had some custom orders to get out."

"How about your other neighbors?"

"Dr. Phipps is just a nodding acquaintance. An uppity fellow. These new people, the Wynnes, well—" He hesitated. "I think they are quite inconsiderate keeping a dog and then lying about it."

"A dog? Why lie about a dog? Doesn't Miss Adams allow pets?"

"When I complained to her, she insisted they didn't have one, but believe me they do. Some nights the yowls come right-up through my flooring. Of course, Miss Adams doesn't hear it because she and her brother are old and partly deaf."

"You've lived in Copley Mews for three years, Mr. Gorshin. Can you tell me if you have ever seen Tremont Adams walk?"

"Certainly," Gorshin responded without hesitation. "Many times. He uses the wheeled chair for resting during the day, as I understand it."

Throughout the rest of the day, Fenley doggedly gathered facts at various places around the city. One of his stops was at the Royal Hotel, where the Wynnes had lived for a short time. The Royal was just three doors from the Hotel Standish, where Dora Rooney, the first victim, had worked.

"Dogs are not allowed at the Royal, Captain, we are a quality hotel," the assistant manager said rather stuffily. If his first question had insulted the frock-coated hotel official, Fenley's next absolutely appalled him.

"Working girls visiting in guests' rooms! My dear Captain, I don't know what you're suggesting, but let me tell you, sir, that you are besmirching the reputation of a respectable family hotel!"

After Fenley had left, the assistant manager adjusted his pince-nez and thought. A dog, of course that was it. But how had they sneaked it in?

Fenley's next stop was at the College of Physicians and Surgeons. Dr. Phipps was not expected in that day, but Fenley profitably spent some time with the Dean, Dr. John Carruthers.

On the return trip from Morningside Heights, Fenley sat back in the hack and turned it all over in his mind. First, he had to evaluate his reaction to the Commissioner's concern over the Leipzig affair since he had just learned from Carruthers that Phipps had taken advanced study in that city. Then there were the records at the college pharmacy showing that Dr. Phipps regularly withdrew amounts of mercury. When he had asked the young pharmacist the use of mercury in

medicine, he was told, "Any number of diseases, sir." Then the young man had laughed: "I hope he's not vaporizing it—the fumes will drive him crazy." Yes, Fenley had several questions for the arrogant doctor.

He also had to consider the possibility of a dog in the Wynnes' flat. It probably meant nothing, but Joshua Gorshin didn't strike him as a man to make things up just to start trouble.

The policeman now on permanent duty at the gate saluted as the Captain entered the courtyard and reported that everyone was home except for Mr. Wynne and Mr. Gorshin, who had left early in the day.

"Good. I won't need them anyway. If Dr. Phipps comes out, tell him to wait. I'll be in the Wynnes' flat."

Maude Wynne's face appeared in the crack of the slightly open door. Fenley explained that he would like to come in, and after some hesitation she swung the door open. Her face had a nervous smile.

"I really haven't picked up around here today, Captain," she said, offering him an easy chair.

"Mrs. Wynne, have you ever owned a dog?"

"We had a collie at home when I was a child."

"You're being facetious, ma'am. I meant since you moved to New York."

"No."

"Your neighbors suspect you do, but I don't. I would have sensed it or heard it when I was here the last time. I think you have a problem in your life, ma'am, and perhaps you should tell me about it."

She expelled a futile sigh. "Come with me, Captain," she said, leading him to the rear of the flat. She stopped outside a closed door and pushed it open. Fenley walked into the bedroom and looked at it with amazement. The floor was thickly carpeted from wall to wall. The walls themselves and the ceiling were completely covered with large sheets of heavy cotton batting.

"Do you know what night terrors are, Captain?"

"I was a major in the war, ma'am."

"My husband spent two years in battle and then three years at Andersonville prison camp."

"Three years!" Fenley exclaimed, shaking his head. To spend one week in that dreaded Confederate pesthouse would unhinge anyone.

"He's not insane, as you could see, but every now and then he

wakes up from a horrible dream screaming at the memories of what he has been through. The doctors in Chicago said it will pass in time. He didn't kill those girls, Captain. He couldn't swat a fly now without crying."

Fenley knew well of what she spoke. He had been a seasoned policeman before going to war and yet the memories of carnage still affected him at times. "Thank you for your candor, Mrs. Wynne," he said to her as he turned from the room.

Dr. Phipps sat back in his desk chair and cupped his hands behind his head. "I see your original problem has compounded itself, Captain."

"Doubled itself, you mean. I take it your window drapes were closed last night as usual. Too bad. I thought I'd catch you up at the college today."

"No classes today. I'm just working on my own project at home."

"I was interested to learn that you were in Leipzig before coming here to teach."

Suddenly Phipps broke into a scornful fit of laughter. "Forgive me, Captain, but the military mental process always amuses me. Yes, I was in Leipzig, but I can assure you—" his laughter was almost convulsive at this point—"that I am not the infamous street stabber of Leipzig. Nor am I the killer of Thirteenth Street. You see, my dear Captain, I am a surgeon, but I am also an alienist."

"A what?"

"Alienism is a relatively new branch of medicine. It deals with ills of the mind. I spent two years in study at Leipzig and Vienna. You may communicate with Herr Doktor Karl Brunsel at the University of Leipzig, who will vouch for me."

"I simply commented that you had been in Leipzig last year, Doctor. It was you who brought up the street stabber."

"Come, my good man," Phipps said, retaining his sarcastic smile, "pray, no cat-and-mouse tactics. But if you are making comparisons to various unsolved street killings, you're on the wrong track."

"Why? They were all women."

"I can assure you, as a student of the subject, that your Thirteenth Street murders were not compulsive lust slayings, as were all those in Europe."

"And how have you arrived at that conclusion?"

"When I heard of the first girl's death, the similarities crossed my mind, but since simply the throat was cut I immediately discounted it."

"Simply the throat cut!"

"Of course. If it were a lust murder, the work of a twisted mind that sought gratification or revenge for some fancied wrong, the bodies would have been mutilated. Believe me, Captain, it is an almost irrefutable observation—scientific reportage substantiates my theory. No, you'd best seek a different motive."

"One murder could make it revenge. Two make it a madman."

"Oh, a madman, to be sure, but not a lust murderer. Have you checked the local asylums?" He stopped for a moment and then became almost human. "Forgive me, of course you have. You're a professional."

Fenley was not thrown off by the benign flattery. He was a soldier. He attacked. "There are all kinds of madmen, aren't there, Doctor? How about someone who is taking drugs?"

Phipps mused on the point. "Most drugs are depressants, although there are some Near Eastern potions and substances from India which would excite the mental state."

"How about mercury, Doctor?"

The words obviously startled Phipps for a moment. "I'm afraid I don't follow you."

"Mercury fumes, Doctor. Could a scientist conducting an experiment accidentally inhale the vapors and go berserk?"

"Not on a one-time basis. It's a cumulative effect."

"But you have been drawing mercury supplies from the college pharmacy for the past six months."

The doctor was visibly irate. "I believe a lesson in ethics is needed for our pharmacists. Yes, I draw mercury supplies. I am using it to treat a patient. It's experimental work."

"The patient?"

"That, sir, is a doctor-and-patient relationship, and inviolable in law."

"Save your breath, Doctor. Your patient is obviously Tremont Adams. Don't look surprised. Detectives are often as observant as doctors. You are a teaching doctor, with no private practice, yet you bring

the mercury home with you—to a house with a sick man in residence. If I ask you about Mr. Adams's ailment you'll just invoke your patient-doctor relationship, so let me tell you instead."

"It's a free country, Captain."

"I know. I spent five years of my life making it so. I have also been a policeman for near on twenty years and I've seen every dreg humanity can toss up. Your patient has advanced venereal disease. I've seen those fellows turn into raving madmen before, Doctor, and I could take you in for withholding vital information in a murder investigation."

"You certainly aren't suggesting that Mr. Adams—I can give you qualified assurance that Tremont is in a secondary state in which there is little brain damage. The mercury is applied locally in an aqueous solution and is not dangerous."

"You know, Doctor, this is the damndest case ever. I've got a potential madman on the second floor, a recovering madman on the third, and a very fast-talking doctor on the ground level."

"I take it Mr. Gorshin has been most convincing. How has he escaped suspicion, pray tell?"

"Instinct, Doctor. He's a prissy old lady, but that hatmaker wouldn't harm a flea."

"Hatmaker!" Dr. Phipps exclaimed. "I thought he was a haberdasher!"

"Well, they sell hats, don't they?"

"But you said *make* hats. Felt hats?"

"Yes. He became quite upset when I handled one of his custom-made models."

Phipps was on his feet. "Damn my stupidity," he accused himself. He looked at Fenley with deadly seriousness. "Don't you see? Felt is made by steaming rabbit under fur. It's called carroting, and it's done with mercury! There's your madman, Captain. I've been blind, thinking he was a sot. But those shaky hands—it's a mercury-induced palsy."

"Are you sure? Why hasn't he gone mad before this?"

"I told you, it's a cumulative effect that's just starting to emerge in hallucinations. I don't think he'll remember a thing about the killings."

The next day, Joshua Gorshin received six rush orders for custom-made felt hats. All the customers were plainclothesmen. The work kept

Gorshin at his workrooms well past nine in the evening. He appeared drunk when he let himself into the now unguarded iron gate and stumbled up to his rooms.

Parting the drapes in Phipps's front room, Fenley and Phipps studied the courtyard. "She starts down the street in five minutes," Fenley said in a low voice. "Do you really think he watches the street when he's under the influence?"

"We'll soon find out. From his top-floor vantage point, he can observe the entire block. I don't know why he manifests the hallucination. Some deep-seated hatred, possibly. Hush."

On the hallway stair, footsteps could be heard. The front door opened and a figure in a half crouch, almost animallike, crept toward the gate.

"He must have spotted her," Phipps whispered.

"I don't think Sergeant Casey would appreciate being called her," Fenley whispered back. "There he goes. Come on."

Two days later, Joshua Gorshin had been sent to a local asylum for treatment, and Phipps was entertaining Fenley in his room. Phipps passed the port decanter.

"Well, if I had known the vital fact that Gorshin was a hatter, I could have solved this like that," Phipps said with a snap of his fingers.

"But someone had to go out and collect the facts, Doctor."

"*Touché*. You know, Captain, for some strange reason I think ours can turn into quite a friendship."

"Possibly," Fenley said. "Just possibly."



It's almost 1984. Do you know who your enemy is? . . .

EXPERIMENT

by
EDWARD
WELLEN



Paul Snider unlocked the door and Ernest Pusey lugged the suitcase inside. Snider closed and bolted the door but did not switch on the light. Enough illumination came in through the uncurtained window from the street lamps to let them see what they were doing once their eyes grew used to the dimness.

Pusey unlatched the suitcase and assembled the components that lay neatly fitted in foam plastic molded to their shapes. The bare apart-

ment had not even an orange box or someone's old ironing board, much less table and chairs, so Pusey stood the sturdy suitcase up on end against the window and rested the assembly on that and on the window sill. The device had its own power pack, so there was no necessity to plug into an outlet. All that remained was to pick their target for tonight.

They gazed across at the apartment complex that had yielded them subjects every night this past week. It was the darkened windows, not the scattered bright few, that drew their eyes.

"All right, Pusey, let's get cracking." With heavy humor Snider gestured broadly. "You do the honors. Pick another subject at random."

Pusey felt his face twitch and was glad for the comparative dark. He put his cheek to the stock of the device and sighted through the night scope. He pointed to the leftmost tower. "I'm choosing Block A."

"O.K. Narrow it down."

Pusey scanned a row of bedroom windows. He passed over a couple—hadn't they heard of blinds?—and a woman who sat sleeping against the headboard of her bed, facing the pattern of a channel that had gone off the air.

They needed a subject who was alone and the woman would have served, but Pusey decided against her. She seemed his mother's age. Maybe he was getting soft. He tightened his mouth and would have swung back to the woman, but again he decided no. Snider would have held that momentary indecision against him. Sniders and Puseys could have no doubts or second thoughts.

His scope pulled in a man alone in bed. Warm night, no blanket, no pajama top. Shaggy male. No doubts, no second thoughts.

"This is the one. Twelve up, six across." Pusey felt a sense of power, yet mounting misgivings made him awkward. He pressed the trigger and locked it in place. There was a hum and a small red dot appeared in the man's bedroom—"See it?"

Snider snorted. "Of course I see it. Zero in."

Pusey sought to pin the dot to the man's head. He could feel Snider's disdain and displeasure as the dot wavered. That only made it harder to hold the dot on target. It didn't help that the subject picked these moments to turn and toss in response to some unpleasant inner vision.

Snider lost patience. "If you have qualms about this, Pusey, you're

in the wrong line. The company doesn't like softies. I'm telling you right now I've been evaluating you, and the hesitancy I've noticed doesn't help you one bit. You seemed gung ho as long as you were shuffling the papers setting this project up. O.K., theorizing is fine, it's what gets projects like Mindbend off the ground, but in the end it all comes down to seeing whether or not it works. This is one experiment it's no good using mice and rats for. The proper study of mankind is man."

Pusey blinked hard to wash the sting of sweat from his eyes. He stifled the fatal urge to tell Snider that some people are rats—Paul Snider, for example. Look at how Snider stood poised to hog the credit for success or weasel out of the blame for failure. Pusey set his jaw and tightened all his muscles to make himself part of the device. The dot held steady near the subject's ear.

"Here we are."

"That's more like it, Pusey. Now see if you can manage to hold it there while I work on the subject."

Snider picked up the mike that patched into the light gun. This was the part Snider loved. He pitched his voice in a sepulchral whisper.

His whisper rode the laser beam to the sleeping man.

"Listen. Listen to your inner voices. There's evil abroad in the land, a global conspiracy of ungodly forces. Why else is the world in such sad shape, with injustice triumphant? On every hand, sinister influences. These people are doing the devil's work. Beware! One of your neighbors, one even of your fellow workers, one of your best friends, one even of your dearest and closest relatives may be in league with the devil's brood. You never know who you can trust. Listen. Listen to your inner voices."

The dot slid off as the man sat up in bed and stared around. Pusey got it back on target. Snider whispered a repeat of his spiel. The man swung out of bed and stood swaying dizzily and shaking his head. Then he strode to the window and glared out at the night.

Though Pusey knew the man could not see him, he drew back in spite of himself. Snider thumbed the mike off and laughed.

"Don't be afraid, Pusey. He doesn't know what hit him. Now get back on target. We'll show him he's not dreaming."

The dot found the man's head again. The whisper reached the man's mind again.

Pusey managed to hold on the man as the man moved around and switched his television set first on and then off. No, the voice did not come from there. The man picked up a glass from the night table and held the mouth of the glass to the bedroom wall he shared with a neighbor and pressed his ear to the bottom of the glass. No, the voice did not come from there.

Snider thumbed himself off to say, "Beautiful, beautiful." He eyed his digital watch. "We'll give him a breathing spell, let him think it's over, and when he's convinced himself he's imagined the whole thing we'll hit him again."

The man seemed to feel the feverish warmth of the infra-red beam. Invisible to him, the dot rode the back of his hand as he palmed his forehead, testing. The dot couldn't follow him when he took the glass to the bathroom but it picked him up again when he came back with water in the glass and pills in his hand. He swallowed the tablets and washed them down, then sat slumped on the edge of his bed. Finally, he shrugged heavily and made ready to lie down.

Snider switched the mike on and whispered his message once more. The man pressed his palms to his ears, but he could not keep the whisper out.

Snider switched the mike off, seeming smug and yet sorry it was over. "That winds up this phase." He stretched and yawned. "I'll be glad to get back on daylight schedule—this has played hell with my biological rhythms, to say nothing of my social life." He hurried to set the record straight. "Of course, no sacrifice is too great to make for the company."

Pusey chimed in automatically. "Of course." He unlocked the trigger of the light gun. The dot vanished. He watched the subject. The man still sat slumped on the edge of the bed, his head jerking around from time to time suspiciously as if to catch the echoes in his mind. "How do we follow up?"

Snider was at his most condescending. "Simplicity itself. No need to waste precious man hours studying the subsequent behavior of individual subjects. The scientific way to establish the effectiveness of this technique is to make a statistical comparison. We'll check with the local precinct house—without telling the police what we're looking for, of course. All they have to know is that a government agency is interested in variations in the incidence of crime over, say, the past six

months—a recent jump in unprovoked attacks on strangers, on neighbors, on fellow workers, on friends, on relatives. A sudden increase in paranoid reports to the police about conspiracies. That's what we're really looking for. Because that will prove the technique works."

He laughed. "I don't imagine you'll mind poring over the statistics. That's more your line anyway. Paperwork's so much easier on the nerves, isn't it, Pusey?" He grew brisk. "We'll pack up now. Here's the door key. I'll go down and bring the car around front. Save some time. You police the room and make sure we've left nothing to show anyone from the company's ever been here, then lock up. I'll be waiting."

Pusey had started to disassemble the light gun. He paused to nod. "Right."

Snider left. Pusey held still, listening to Snider's footsteps whisper away. His face tightened and he screwed the light gun together again. He found the bedroom across the way and pinned the dot to the subject once more. He spoke softly into the mike.

"Listen," he said. "Listen to your inner voices. You will know no peace till you strike down your enemy. Your enemy has a name. The name is Paul Snider. His address is—"

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As a certain British statesman once said, "A few honest men are better than numbers . . ."

A MATTER OF JURISDICTION



In one way it was a perfectly simple case; but on the other hand there were complications, many and devious, for J. G. Saunders, Esquire, had not been an ordinary man.

To begin with, there was the question of where he lived. He had a house, as anybody could see, but where was it? Since it straddled the state line, it was physically in two states and two different counties, both of which claimed it for tax purposes. To which J.G. responded

that they were each trying to tax a house with only three walls within its boundaries, and of what value was that kind of a house? So he refused to pay either.

His coin collection, worth hundreds of thousands of dollars, was another matter. When the assessor from Le Page County came to evaluate personal property, J.G. saw him at the main gate and moved the collection into Morgan County, on the other side of the room and in another state. And when the Morgan County assessor showed up, J.G. merely reversed the process. And since the two assessors were not on speaking terms, the matter remained moot.

Such was not the case, however, with the police chiefs in the same two counties. Although there was plenty of opportunity for friction, the two men were friends and they met more or less regularly for a beer at the Right Side Bar, where drinks were a few cents cheaper because of a tax differential.

"You can handle the case," Willy Wharton said. He was a big, spare, bony guy, with a beak for a nose and eyes like an eagle, and he could mimic anything from a yowling baby to One-Finger Mooney, who ran the garbage racket in the next county.

Dan didn't fall into the trap. He was as big as Willy but he had more upholstery, and his nose was trimmed down to a splash that was a little broader on the port side than on the starboard.

"Willy," he said, "I don't want to get in your way. You were here first, it's your case."

It was quite true that Willy had arrived before Dan, but purely by accident. J.G.'s housekeeper had discovered the body when she'd come in that Tuesday morning to clean. She'd driven in the back way, through the screen of bushes that always scratched up her car, and parked at the rear of the house, as usual. It was spring, the sun was shining and the sky was blue, and she noted that a couple of chickadees, a red poll, and a finch were working the feeding stations, which were half full.

She entered the house from the Morgan County side, went through the kitchen, and saw the body lying in the middle of the living room floor. J.G. had been stabbed and beaten and the room had been ransacked and the coin collection taken.

At the sight in front of her, she let out a shriek of horror and would probably have continued screaming and built up a nice case of hys-

terics, but there was nobody around to hear, so all she did was utter her one shriek and then rush to the phone. But with the receiver off the hook and her forefinger on the dial, she realized she had a problem. Which police to call.

The problem was insurmountable, and she dodged it by calling her husband and letting him decide. And since he worked in Le Page, he notified Willy, who rushed to the scene.

He slowed up at the main gate long enough to see that it was locked tight. Then he circled the estate, turned into the dirt road, and turned again to come in through the hidden driveway. He found the housekeeper waiting in her car.

"He's inside," she said, and her voice slid off into a kind of incoherence. Thereafter she fluttered about like an uncertain bird, appearing and disappearing in the background, uncertain whether to go or to stay, and accomplishing nothing.

As for Willy, once he was inside the house he faced the same dilemma that she had, except that he was under a certain disadvantage. Having been called in, he could hardly walk out on a homicide. Nevertheless his job was to know the law and obey it, and the law gave him no power outside his jurisdiction. So the question was, in which state and in which county had J.G. been killed? And precisely where was the dividing line?

The question was one of great delicacy and of considerable personal importance. Willy had recently been under attack for exceeding his budget and had been advised to fire one of his men, which he'd refused to do. He was then ordered to cut his expenses to the bone. For a homicide of this nature, however, he'd have to put in a request for the medical examiner and state lab experts, all of whom billed the county for services performed.

With those facts in mind, Willy moved swiftly. He went to the phone and in a disguised voice he called the Morgan County police and informed them of a homicide. He gave the location and hung up without giving any further data. Then he sat down on his side of the state line and waited.

Dan, accompanied by an assistant, arrived promptly, saw Willy, and sized up the situation. "Hi," he said. "It seems you want a little help."

Willy shook his head. "They got me here by mistake, but I have no jurisdiction. I just hung around to make sure no clues were disturbed.

Think nothing of it, Dan. Just a personal favor."

"It won't wash," Dan said. He turned and spoke to his assistant. "Better go back to the office, Joe. Nothing here for us."

Willy objected. "Dan, this is out of my hands. While I'd like to go to bat on this, seeing as how J.G. was a friend of mine, I'd get into trouble working on something that was none of my business."

Dan, standing on the opposite side of the room, moved forward three paces. "Willy," he said, "J.G. told us once that the state line went right through his living room."

"Through the center of it, more or less."

"So when I'm standing here, I'm in Morgan County and you're in Le Page, but if I take another step forward, I won't know where I am."

"What are you getting at?"

"Now you do the same thing. Walk towards me as long as you're sure you're in Le Page, and then stop."

Willy nodded, strode forward, and halted when he was a good six or seven feet from Dan, with the body in between them. "Now what?" he said.

"Most of the blood's on your side," Dan said. "That's where he was stabbed and that's where he died."

"How do you know where he died?" Willy said. "It looks like he staggered around before he collapsed, but the fact of the matter is that you can see he hit his head on the corner of that marble table and knocked his brains out. When the brain dies you're dead—and that happened in Morgan."

"In my book a man's dead when his heart stops. That brain theory may hold in your state, but not here. Willy, you're my friend, and while I'd like to handle this it just wouldn't be fair to you. It's your case and you ought to get the credit for it when it's all over."

"Credit?" Willy said. "Dan, I don't want to stand in your way. You take the credit, and I'll stand by and do whatever I can."

Dan shook his head. "Willy," he said, "remember that evening last April?"

Willy remembered all right. J.G. had invited the two of them and their wives for dinner. It had been a good dinner. Afterwards, J.G., a little rooster of a man with a stringy neck and an Adam's apple that bobbed up and down like a fisherman's cork, had knocked himself out trying to entertain them. First, he'd performed a couple of magic

tricks, and done them rather badly. Then, in both pride and humility, he'd showed the four of them his collection. His words had been solemn and impressive as he handed around a couple of ancient Roman coins.

"These are part of history," he said. "When you touch them, you touch Julius Caesar and Pompey. And who knows? The fingers of Cleopatra may have brushed across this golden surface."

Willy had touched the coin gingerly. "Mr. Saunders," he said, "things like this—they ought to be locked up in a safe. They're too valuable to keep here, unprotected. Any crook who hears about this, he's going to come in some night and take the stuff."

"I'm well insured," J.G. said, "and when I die a museum gets my collection. But until then, it stays here, where I can enjoy it."

"Then you ought to have some kind of a burglar alarm installed. The kind that will notify us if any unauthorized person tries to break in."

"Which police?" J.G. said. "In which state?"

So there it was, the conundrum that J.G. had stated himself. And now Willy gave the only answer he could think of. "Dan," he said, "how about tossing a coin?"

Dan shook his head. "No. This is too important to decide that way. But I'll tell you what. Call your D.A. and brief him on the case and ask him if you have jurisdiction. Then I'll do the same."

Willy agreed. "Not up to us. Things like this, let somebody else decide, huh?"

Willy called first, spoke to the Le Page district attorney for a couple of minutes, and then put the phone down firmly. "He says not to do anything until he checks up on the law."

Without comment, Dan picked up the phone and made his call. He was grim when he'd finished it. "Same thing," he said. "So do we sit on it for a few days while all the clues get stale? Then our bright boys will probably call back and tell us it's a complicated question, the courts ought to decide."

Willy gazed down at the small inert body. "Dan," he said, "let's forget the homicide for a while. There's a coin cabinet on your side of the room and another one on mine, and they've both been cleaned out, so we've each got a robbery case. Right?"

"Right. So you investigate yours while I look into mine. Then we can compare notes."

"Right," Willy said, and went into the bedroom.

It was undisturbed and the bed had not been slept in. He got down on his hands and knees to look for stains on the carpet, emptied the pockets of the clothes hanging in the closet, and opened every bureau drawer and studied the contents. But all he came up with of any importance was a small green address book.

Most of the names in it were of local service men—carpenters, plumbers, and electricians. As for the out-of-state addresses, Willy assumed that a good many were those of numismatists with whom J.G. had been in regular correspondence. But one name that aroused his curiosity was that of Saunders, Mrs. J.G., 28 Hanover Road.

A wife? Willy had known J.G. fairly well, but he'd lived alone and had never mentioned a wife. Still, that was the kind of thing the little rooster might keep to himself.

When Willy returned to the living room, Dan was sitting in a carved wooden chair on his side of the room. "Find anything?" Willy asked.

Dan nodded. "The back door was jimmied, and a kitchen knife was lying on the counter. No prints on the knife, and most of the blood on it was wiped off with a paper towel. And in the bathroom it's obvious that somebody showered and cleaned himself off."

Willy made a face. "This is a real messy job. Anything else?"

"I went out and had a look at the main gate, which fronts on the state road, and you know the kind of lock it has—one of those old-fashioned types you got to close with a key. The key's hanging on a hook next to the back door over there." Dan pointed to it. "What did you come up with?"

"This," Willy said, holding up the address book. "There's a Mrs. J. G. Saunders listed in it. She's the first person I want to see."

He saw her about an hour later, at 28 Hanover Street. The neat brick house was set back some distance from the road, and a sign at the entrance to the driveway read VERNA'S BEAUTY SHOPPE. Willy drove in, saw three cars in the parking area, and from force of habit he noted the license plates. Two were for local cars, the third a rental job from downstate.

He parked next to the rental car and strode up to the entrance of the house. When he opened the door, a bell rang in back and a voice called out, "Just sit down a while. I'm in the middle of a streak job."

Willy selected the only decent-sized chair in the small garish waiting room and scanned the magazines on the plastic-topped table. *Glamour*, *Girl Talk*, *Vogue*, *Hairdo & Beauty*. With a grimace, he turned away and stared through the window. He could see a lilac bush and a dog kennel, but no sign of a mutt.

He picked up *Hairdo & Beauty*, replaced it, and thought back to the murder scene. A few things seemed pretty clear to him.

Whoever had killed J.G. had probably come through that half concealed road and left the same way, because nobody would unlock the gate, drive through it, and leave the car while he locked the gate and walked back to the house to hang up the key next to the back door. So he'd either been familiar with the place or he had been working with someone who was, because nobody would take that back road unless he knew about it.

Second, since he'd used the kitchen knife, he'd been unarmed and hadn't expected to kill J.G. or even see him. But when he did see him, he'd killed him rather than let him live to identify. Then he'd gone into the bathroom and cleaned up.

Since he could hardly go around in his blood-stained clothes, he must have taken J.G.'s. J.G. was a small man and so the perpetrator, too, was probably small. In conclusion, then, they had to find a small man and some discarded bloody clothes. And get the fingerprint men to work.

Willy heard voices from the back of the house, heard footsteps, and heard someone say, "Next Wednesday then, Mrs. Holst?"

A sing-song voice answered. "Maybe sooner if Maxie doesn't like this—"

"Oh, Mrs. Holst, how can you say that? Your hair looks beautiful."

"You don't know Maxie. He's upset, something happened last night, and when he's upset—"

The sing-song voice trailed off, a door slammed, and a few seconds later a small-knifelike woman wearing a white smock erupted into the room and stopped short at the sight of Willy.

"I thought you were a customer," she said sharply. "What do you want?"

"You're Mrs. J. G. Saunders?" Willy asked.

"Nobody calls me that any more," she said. "Who are you? What do you want?"

"Police," Willy said, and showed his identification. "What do you call yourself?"

"Verna Oliver, which is my maiden name. I've been using it for the past ten years."

"Divorced?"

"I didn't bother. Why? The little runt has something to do with this, hasn't he?"

Willy nodded. "You weren't on good terms with him, were you?"

"You can say that again. What are you getting at?"

"He was killed last night."

"Good," she said.

"What's good about it?" Willy asked.

"That collection of his. Officer, all the time we were married, he just about starved me. He wouldn't let me eat or buy clothes—every damn dollar he made went into that collection, and now I've got it."

Willy didn't disillusion her. After all, she was a brand new widow and she had a right to her thoughts, even if they were cockeyed.

"When was the last time you saw him?" he asked.

"Let's see. I guess it was a year ago last Christmas. Why? What difference does it make?" Willy kept studying her and she said abruptly, "How was he killed? Who did it?"

"How do you know somebody did it?" Willy said. "How do you know it wasn't an accident?"

"His collection. They didn't steal it, did they?"

"I'm trying to find out who killed him," Willy said.

"Then go ahead and try, but you can do a lot better than coming around here."

"That," Willy said, "is debatable." He took out his notebook. "Where were you yesterday from five P.M. on?"

He exchanged information with Dan that evening at the Right Side Bar. "And that's about all," Willy said when he'd finished. "How about you?"

Dan licked his lips. "Know Maxie Holst?" he asked.

"No, but his wife—why? What about him?"

"He was driving east on the old county road last night when somebody coming in the other direction made a left turn right in front of him, at the intersection of the state road."

"Not far from J.G.'s," Willy said. "So?"

"So Maxie swerved and banged into a tree, while the other car went right on. He wants me to find out who made that left turn. He's mad, he says he wants action and that I'll be out of a job if I don't get hold of the driver of the other car."

"There's nothing much you can do without a description of the car," Willy said. "Forget about it."

"Forget about it? Maxie called me four times today. First he said the car was a blue Pontiac, then he said he thought it was a Chevy, then he phoned to say he wasn't sure what kind it was, but the driver had a dark mustache. A few minutes ago I got a message that Maxie'd changed his mind, maybe the driver didn't have a mustache at all."

"So that's all you did? Play hide-and-seek with Maxie?"

For answer, Dan let out about a hundred cubic inches of breath in a whoosh that sent a couple of paper napkins skidding off the table. He didn't pick them up.

"You don't know Maxie," he said. "Once he's on your back, he sticks like a wad of chewing gum. But I did find out something else, during the time he wasn't itching me. I went over to the Elite where it seems J.G. had an early dinner every Tuesday night and then went to the movies, first show. He always had the same waitress—name of Rita."

"What did she say?"

"I couldn't locate her. This is her day off and she won't be back until tomorrow, but she did tell somebody that she was worried about J.G. He hardly ate anything, said he wasn't feeling well and was going to skip the movie and go straight home."

"Maybe he expected to see somebody at home and had to make up an excuse for changing his routine."

"Nobody he had to make excuses to."

"Yeah. Nice easy life, huh?"

The two men looked away from each other and thought about a life without responsibilities. Then they sighed, finished their beer, and resumed their discussion of the case.

They had pretty much the same idea—that someone had gone to the house in the belief that J.G. wouldn't show up until nine or ten in the evening and he'd come home unexpectedly and surprised whoever it was. Either because of some bitter personal argument or because the

person couldn't afford to be identified, he'd grabbed the kitchen knife and gone berserk with it.

Dan turned and motioned to the bartender for two more, then he said, "What time did Verna's bridge game start?"

"Around eight. What time did Maxie get wrecked?"

"Seven-ten P.M.," Dan said, "but why hook that up with Verna? She could have gone to J.G.'s any time at all, once he'd left, and still be there when he got home. She hated him and had every reason to go haywire. So suppose she carved him up, changed into his clothes, and rushed over to her bridge game—she could make it by eight. Men and women dress the same now, she could get by with wearing his stuff."

"But why would she take his collection when she could expect to get it then anyhow?"

"For the insurance money," Dan said. "If the collection goes to a museum, she loses out, or at the very best she has a law suit on her hands. But if the collection disappears, it's turned into insurance money—it's cash and she gets it. No museum claim, no fuss. She's still his wife and she's entitled to her share."

The beers came and Willy took a sip of his and slammed the glass down on the table. "Damn it!" he said. "How do I get a search warrant to go through her place? Not on the ifs and buts we're slinging around. If the lab men would get to work and turn up a few fingerprints, we might have something. But the D.A. won't bring them in, and the state won't send any men up here because the D.A. told them they have no jurisdiction. So where the hell are we?"

"Let's go up there tomorrow and do the work ourselves. What do we need all the specialists for?"

"O.K.," Willy said. "I guess we can do most everything except release the body, which the law says is up to the M.E. So how long is he going to wait? Until—"

"Cool it," Dan said. "I got in touch with an undertaker who knows both M.E.'s. He said he'll get them together."

In the morning Willy found a note on his desk to call Dr. O'Hara, the local M.E., about the Saunders death.

"Doc?" Willy said. "Chief Wharton here. I got your message. What gives?"

O'Hara's dry doleful voice moaned into the phone. "Contents of

stomach partly digested. I estimate the time of death one to two hours after eating—

"He had dinner around five," Willy said, "so he was killed around seven. That figures."

"We found a gold coin, dated 1656, with the words 'God with us' on the face and 'The Commonwealth of England' on the back. A shield with a cross on one side—on the other side two shields and one of them with a cross. The coin was apparently swallowed sometime before death, as evidenced by—"

"When can I see it?" Willy asked. "Where is it?"

"I can't give it to you," O'Hara said, "until the court permits."

"Where is it?"

"In the Third National Bank in a safety-deposit box under the names of myself and Dr. Wesley, my counterpart in Morgan County. It's a half crown of considerable value. Now the subject's wounds consist of three lateral incisions in the third intercostal—"

Willy hardly listened. J.G. had swallowed a gold coin before he'd died. But why? What for?

When O'Hara had finished, Willy called Dan. "Doc Wesley told me the same thing," Dan said. "What do you make of it?"

"Some kind of message," Willy said. "He was trying to tell us something. His last act. He's wounded and he knows he's going to die, so he swallows this coin. Why else would he do something like that?"

"I'm with you there," Dan said, "but what's the message? Come on, meet me at J.G.'s and we'll take another look around."

Dan arrived almost an hour late. "I'm sorry," he said, "but Maxie's still after me. He called last night and said it was a woman driving that car, and then he called this morning to say there were two people in the car and he wants both of them arrested on a hit-and-run charge. I told him they hadn't hit him, so he said I should arrest them for leaving the scene of an accident. I told him they weren't at the scene, the accident happened after they left the scene, and how could I find them when he kept giving me different descriptions?"

"Look," Willy said. "Let's talk about J.G. and that gold coin he swallowed. Did he pick out that particular coin or was it the first one he could grab hold of?"

"I'll ask Maxie," Dan said. "He has all the answers."

"If it was just any coin," Willy said, "it doesn't make much sense, so

we have to assume that this particular coin had a message. So what was on the coin again?"

"'God with us,' " Dan said, "and 'The Commonwealth of England.' And those three shields, two of them with crosses."

"Double-cross!" Willy said.

"All right, but how does that help? Who double-crossed him and how are we supposed to guess?"

"It must have been his wife," Willy said.

Dan shook his head. "They hadn't seen each other in years and weren't talking to each other, so how could she double-cross him? What about?" Willy didn't answer and Dan said, "How about commonwealth as meaning his wealth in common with his wife?"

"It comes back to her every time," Willy said, "but then what? He'd know that any investigation would include his wife, so what's he telling us?"

"Let's start all over," Dan said. "Let's start with the date on the coin, 1656. What happened in 1656?"

"In England," Willy added.

"Nothing happened in 1656," Dan said, "and I know my history. I was a whiz at it in school. William the Conqueror came over in 1066, the Magna Carta was signed in 1215, Shakespeare was born in 1564, and Charles I was beheaded in 1640. That's why they had a commonwealth."

"I thought—" Willy said, and then he stopped and a broad grin slowly widened his mouth. "I know my history too. Oliver Cromwell was the head of the commonwealth."

"So?"

"So Oliver," Willy said, "was Verna Saunders' maiden name. She did do it!"

"Or somebody else named Oliver," Dan said. "Any more Olivers in that address book?"

"I got it with me right here," Willy said, "let's see." He opened the book to the O's and read off the names. "Jane Oliver—lives in Boston. Richard Oliver, New York. James Oliver, see Mackensen." He turned back the pages to the M's and read off: "Oliver Mackensen, 1418 Cherry Drive, Los Angeles, California."

"Sounds promising," Dan said. "Particularly since James Oliver seems to go under an alias."

But Willy wasn't listening. His eyes were half closed and he appeared to be going into a kind of trance. When he opened his eyes, they were gleaming. "Hurrah for Maxie!" he said.

"What are you talking about?"

"That left-hand turn in front of him. As if the guy thought he had a right to make it."

"So?"

"In California you have the right of way for a left-hand turn at an intersection. So here's James Oliver, he flies in from California maybe at Verna's suggestion. She gives him all the information he needs and he rents a car and goes to J.G.'s, making that left-hand turn on the way. If you're going to commit a crime, you're pretty careful about minor infractions, aren't you? Anybody in the East would make sure not to make a wrong turn, but James Oliver thought he was obeying regulations."

"Sounds reasonable," Dan said, "but one thing bothers me. Granted that J.G. recognized him—what of it? J.G. was a pretty mild guy, nothing vindictive about him, so he could probably be talked out of prosecuting. So why would Oliver commit homicide? There was hate or terror in it, way beyond the normal."

"Let's get hold of this Oliver. And if he's not around, notify the California police to ask him a few questions."

Dan and Willy met at the Right Side Bar late that night and gloated over the answers the day had brought.

Yes, Oliver Mackensen had flown in from California the day before the murder and flown back the night after, and yes, he had rented a car, the one Willy had spotted at Verna's. Willy had gotten a search warrant and found part of the coin collection at Verna's. She admitted she had engineered the theft and worked out the robbery with James Oliver, although she denied any part in the murder. But the big surprise was the phone call from the California police.

"They told me," Willy said, "that they arrested Mackensen at the Cherry Drive address and charged him with a 1972 homicide in San Diego. They'd been looking for him for years, which explains why he had to kill J.G. Because if the name of James Oliver, alias Mackensen, ever got on the wires he was through. And even a routine investigation of the robbery would go to California asking about a possible heir

named James Oliver, alias Oliver Mackensen."

"So California has him," Dan said, "and they're keeping him and refusing extradition, which takes us off the hook. So in all honesty, where do you really think J.G. was killed?"

"In Morgan County," Willy said promptly.

Dan shook his head. "Wrong. In Le Page."

He swung around as a girl with long blonde hair bent over the table and spoke to him. "Did you want to see me?" she said. "I'm Rita. I waited on Mr. Saunders the other night. What did you want to know?"

"It doesn't make much difference now," Dan said, "the case is solved. But I still wonder why he went home instead of going to the movies. He said he was sick."

"Well, he'd been practicing a trick that afternoon and swallowed a coin by mistake, and he was worried. Is it important?"

"Yes and no," Dan said. Then he turned to Willy. "Cromwell," he said.

"Oliver," Dan said drily.



Speaking of coming attractions, how do you feel about flashbacks?

MEETING KATHLEEN CASEY



by **BARBARA
CALLAHAN**

Today I learned that there is no statute of limitations on psychic pain.

Meeting Kathleen Casey recycled emotions long stored in the warehouse of my mind, emotions consigned there after she and her Aunt Bridget killed my grandfather with the most lethal weapon on earth: words. With more persistence than the footsteps of a hired killer, words stalked my grandfather until they pushed him into his grave.

The first painful memory aroused by meeting Kathleen Casey today

was of a scene in my living-room when I was thirteen years old. I stood in darkness waiting for guidance from a moonbeam or a shaft of light from the streetlamp outside the window. When no light came from either source, I removed a tiny flashlight from the pocket of my robe. Following its pinprick of light past the old piano, I arrived at a wicker basket of gladioli slumped against the front door like an intoxicated sentry. I backed away from the flowers, taking several side-steps to the foot of grandfather's coffin where I paused, remembering his directive to my mother.

"I'll be laid out here at home. I'll not be indecently displayed in Coughlin's fine funeral parlor looking like a mannequin stretched out on a bed in a department-store window. If I've any friends left, let them gaze upon me in my own home where I've made indentations on the chairs and on the carpets. No man has made any impressions on the metal chairs and plush carpets of Coughlin's Antiseptic Dispatching Service. Coughlin wouldn't tolerate signs of life in his establishment."

Exhausted by his proclamation, Grandfather wrapped an afghan around his spindly legs and slipped into sleep, the sanctuary of broken men.

I ran my hand over the cold satin that had been tucked inside the coffin to cover Grandfather's legs to his knees. Inhaling deeply, I slid my hand under it and touched the cuff of his trouser. My fears dissolved when I remembered Grandfather's comment at the cemetery when we had visited Grandmother's grave. "The dead can't hurt you, Maureen—only the living can inflict pain." Bolstered by that memory, I touched Grandfather's ankle and found that Mr. Coughlin had put no socks on him. Imploring the fairies to assist me, I gently traced his foot with my hand. Starting at his little toe, my fingers climbed each one until they reached his big toe where I found what I had hoped would be there—string.

From my pocket I took manicure scissors and clipped the string that had been looped to Grandfather's other big toe. Then I smoothed the satin back into place. In the morning Mr. Coughlin would draw it up to Grandfather's chest before closing the lid of the coffin. He'd never examine Grandfather's feet to see if the string Mother tied there was missing. Although modern in his methods, Mr. Coughlin honored the wishes of the bereaved when they requested that their relatives travel unshod into the country whose morning mist could be seen only by

eyes shut tight and whose gauze plateaus could be reached only by feet tied with string. Fettered by string, the ghost of the departed could not journey back to the realm of substance to harass the living.

I tiptoed to the head of the coffin and kissed Grandfather's waxy cheek.

"Mother meant well, dear Gran," I whispered, "when she tied your toes, but she doesn't understand that your tired old body shriveled and died so that your spirit could be released to pursue our next-door neighbors, Bridget Casey and her niece Kathleen, who killed you with words. I set you free, Gran—now do what you must."

As I straightened the basket of tipsy gladioli, light streamed into the room. An unbeliever might have claimed that the light originated from the headlights of a passing car but I knew that Gran's luminous spirit had glided through the windowpane on its way to the Casey's home.

When I met Kathleen Casey today, I shuddered, experiencing anew the revulsion I felt on seeing her Aunt Bridget at Grandfather's funeral. If Grandfather's ghost had visited her the night before as she sat smearing her fat face with creams and lotions, she didn't appear disturbed by the apparition. Perhaps Grandfather, freed from the bondage of his old body, had soared into the sky to do loop-the-loops as befitting a baby ghost. Perhaps he had decided not to call on Bridget until he had romped about a bit with his new powers. He needed time, I concluded, to get his act together. At the cemetery, Kathleen Casey, my classmate in eighth grade, stood beside her aunt and daintily dabbed at tears rolling down her beautiful face. She was always an actress and years later I was anything but surprised when she became a movie star.

Today as I stared at the beautiful thirty-three-year-old celebrity who was the focal point of all passers-by, I remembered the day she was surrounded in the schoolyard by a group of girls, the intimate friends with whom she had mysteriously escaped the pimples and awkwardness of adolescence. I stood apart from them, wondering about the great secret Kathleen was sharing, unaware that she was preparing the fusillade of epithets aimed at Grandfather's heart. I wondered if she had been kissed in the coat room by Michael Lafferty, the handsome captain of the safety patrol. Feigning disinterest, I volunteered to be steady turner for the fifth-grade girls who were jumping rope. When the bell rang to go back into school, I noticed two of Kathleen's cronies

staring at me and whispering behind their hands. My heart pounded, knowing whatever Kathleen had told them concerned me.

During history, a folded piece of paper sailed onto my desk. I opened the note. "A person who took a trip to Ireland found out that your grandfather left there years ago because he was an informer." Crumpling the unsigned obscenity in my hand, I scanned the classroom and observed that the girls' side of the room was unusually still, full of scholars absorbed in the Monroe Doctrine. Only one person looked at me—Kathleen, niece of the "person" I knew had recently been to Ireland.

Of course it was a lie. Grandfather had fought with the Brotherhood, felling trees to thwart troop movements and carrying messages locked inside his formidable mind to houses throughout the countryside. To escape internment, he had emigrated to the United States in 1915. Hundreds of times I had listened to his tales about the old country and his perilous departure from it "only the length of a fairy's wing ahead of the Constabulary." Yet I knew that the lie carried home by Bridget Casey would be disseminated like the pollen of a noxious weed by every girl in Kathleen's clique.

After school I went to the ravine where I sat under the old oak tree whose gnarled roots housed the fairies. The tree had been pointed out to me by Grandfather as the place where the fairies plotted their mischief. For hours I sat and waited for a glimpse of a diaphanous wing, silently pleading that they come to me so I could ask them to prevent Kathleen's friends from spreading the rumor about Grandfather.

As the hours slipped by, my faith in Grandfather faltered. Finally I stood up and addressed the stubborn creatures who had refused to show themselves.

"I know you're in that tree and I respect your need for privacy, but I have something to ask you. It's too late now to ask for throat infections in the girls so just answer me this: Was Grandfather an informer in the old country?"

Silence. Nothing but treacherous silence. Only once in all my years of believing in fairies did I ask anything of them and the little demons didn't answer me. I picked up a rock and threw it at the tree.

"There!" I shouted. "I hope the roof has caved in on your heads and I hope your wings are crushed and your eyes are knocked out. Goodbye forever, you worthless creatures!"

When I arrived home, my face was bleeding from having been clawed by the branches of trees. I tried to slip unnoticed into the house but Father was sitting in the living room. When he saw my banshee face, he took me upstairs and gently washed my face before asking what had happened to me.

After telling him about the note and my hours in the ravine, I cried, "Was Grandfather an informer?"

"Of course not!" he answered. "An informer received a bullet in his head and never lived to cross the Atlantic. If by chance an informer did make it to the States, he was dealt with soon after his arrival. Your grandfather has lived in Philadelphia for forty-five years. He's a respected member of the community."

At dinner that evening the explanation given to Grandfather for my battered appearance was that I had stayed too long in the park doing a homework assignment in nature study and that I had tripped in the darkness.

"The fairies must have pushed you, my girl," chuckled Grandfather. "They don't like intruders in their territory after nightfall."

While I washed the dishes, my parents went next door to speak to Bridget Casey and they learned that the rumor had originated when Kathleen had eavesdropped on her aunt's weekly card club. In relating the details of her trip to Ireland, Bridget mentioned that the residents of a small village, Grandfather's birthplace, spoke of an informer who had fled to the United States and disappeared in Philadelphia about the same time as Gran. His last name was O'Rourke, the same as Grandfather's. But almost everybody in the village bore the name O'Rourke. "Our neighbor Emmett O'Rourke could never be that informer," announced Bridget Casey to her enthralled audience.

"Of course not," they agreed.

Shortly after Bridget's revelations to her card club and Kathleen's schoolyard theatrics, the Minstrel Show Committee told Gran they had no need for his concertina playing as they had in previous years. He also failed to receive his annual invitation to the Retired Railroad Employees Luncheon. That same week Mr. Fitzpatrick from the meat-packing plant called to tell him that the company would no longer need him as a night watchman.

Grandfather sighed as he hung up the phone but then he brightened.

"Things happen in threes, my girl," he said. Putting on his coat, he waltzed to the door. "I need a good game of checkers to lift my spirits. I'll be going to the Recreation Hall to dazzle the boys with my jumps."

Fifteen minutes later he shuffled into the house.

"The boys didn't feel like a game tonight. I think I'll turn in early."

For a few days Grandfather tried to walk down the familiar corridors of his life but he found all doors tightly shut. Wearily, he settled into his armchair by the window, staring out, waiting for the sole visitor who would not fail him. He ate almost nothing and exercised not at all. I coaxed him for stories of the old country but he refused me, saying I was too old for stories from a foolish old man. Then, on a bright day in April, Grandfather received the caller who made himself a permanent guest.

The shock of seeing Kathleen Casey gracefully sliding into a seat today reactivated the stunning despair I experienced when I found Grandfather dead in his chair. Untying the string from Grandfather's toes so that he could scare her Aunt Bridget to death and force Kathleen into an orphanage eased my pain twenty years ago, but today my anguish returned and I don't know how to deal with the emotions that are swirling and pounding within me.

Daily I spied on Bridget to see if signs of Grandfather's ghostly mischief were appearing on her face, but I saw only light wrinkles instead of the dark smudges and other traces of sleepless nights I had hoped to find. If Grandfather danced eerily around her room at night, she was sleeping through his entire performance. Sadly I concluded that Gran's poor spirit had been too battered in life to be able to assemble a scary routine after death. As his chief mourner, it was up to me to get the show on the road.

In the cellar I made a papier-mâché model of Grandfather's head. I pencilled in eyebrows and eyes on the face and painted on a mouth. Rummaging through a cardboard box containing Grandfather's clothes, I had found a shirt, tie, jacket, and hat. I poked a long stick into the bottom of the papier-mâché head and then took another cardboard box and cut two holes in it to insert the rest of the stick. I dressed the box in Grandfather's clothes. As the final and most frightening touch, I placed Gran's hat on the head, tilting it jauntily as he used to do. Then

I covered him with an old bedspread and put him in a corner of the cellar to wait.

Father and Mother went to bed early that night, giving me the opportunity to creep back down and unveil Grandfather. Carrying him in front of me, I went out the cellar door leading to our backyard. I climbed over the short iron fence that separated our house from the Caseys' and removed plants from a stepladder in their backyard. I carried the stepladder over to the wall of the dining room where Bridget worked every evening on bookkeeping accounts for Farrell's Realty. Then I retrieved Grandfather and holding him by the end of the stick I climbed the ladder and allowed him to peer into the dining room at the woman who had killed him with words. I waited for a scream—a beautiful, soul-chilling scream, a heart-attack kind of scream—but I heard only noisy crickets predicting another hot June day.

Dejected, I descended the ladder and sat on the grass.

There's something we *can* do, Gran, I thought. And carried him back up the ladder.

This time Gran helped me. He tapped at the window with his nose. A few seconds later the most dreadful scream ever screamed on Rosedale Street shattered the night and the nerves of the residents of the block. As lights from houses dotted the darkness on both sides of the street I scrambled over the fence and ran back into the cellar. Before tucking Grandfather back under the bedspread, I gave him a big hug, then tore upstairs onto the sofa where I sat reading an upside-down copy of *Treasure Island* as Mother and Father rushed from the kitchen.

Father charged out the front door, leaped the railing between our porch and Caseys', and ran into their house. I stood out on the porch with Mother and listened to her screaming, which did not abate until Father administered a strong dose of whiskey.

"She said she saw a ghost when she went to the dining-room window," Father told us when he came back.

"Probably a Peeping Tom," said Mother.

Bridget Casey did not go to work the next day. I tried to inveigle Kathleen into a game of Monopoly at her house so I could survey the damage to her aunt at close range, but she had orders not to bring anyone home. And after only a day's rest, Bridget went back to work.

A consultation with Gran in the cellar convinced me that a second apparition would be necessary to shock the woman into a more lingering sickness, one that would drive her into a chair to await the same visitor she had sent to Gran.

For three evenings I hopped the back fence to be confronted by a darkened dining-room window. Politely inquiring after her aunt, I learned from Kathleen that Bridget now worked in her bedroom.

Two nights later when Mother and Father went to see a Gregory Peck movie, I cradled Grandfather in my arms and took him upstairs to the master bedroom that faced the porch roof that extended from our house to Caseys'. I pulled Grandfather through the window onto the sloping roof and crawled over to Bridget's bedroom window. She sat writing at a desk on which a radio was playing music that would likely prevent her from hearing Grandfather's tap.

I knelt behind Grandfather for a long time, waiting for her to look to the window but she never glanced away from her work. I had just about decided to pound on the window with my fist when a blinding light startled me. I jumped up and lost my grip on Grandfather, sending him to a second death on the street below. I crawled across the roof to the window ledge of our house, feeling my way sightlessly. Climbing through the window, I fell into the arms of a strong man who held my elbow tightly. Footsteps pummeled the stairs, then three policemen ran into the room.

"You have a lot of explaining to do, young lady," the fourth one at my elbow said.

When I saw Kathleen Casey today in the building where I work, I remembered another building twenty years ago, the police station where I sat, humiliated, waiting for Father and Mother. When they arrived, ashen and shaking, I cried, "Kathleen and her Aunt Bridget killed Grandfather! They should be here, not me!"

A police officer showed Father my papier-mâché figure of Grandfather, which had been dumped ingloriously on a desk. Father stared at it before saying lamely, "She really loved her grandfather, who recently passed away."

Today as I watched Kathleen chatting with a member of her entourage, I recalled the loathing I felt for her when I learned that she had

been across the street talking with Mary Devlin on the night of my humiliation and she had seen me steal out the window onto the porch roof. It was she who called the police. And the next day, center stage in the schoolyard, she played the role of the loving niece who had exposed her aunt's tormentor. With only a week remaining until graduation, I stopped going to school.

Kathleen brought me my diploma. Draping her beautiful face with remorse, she begged my forgiveness. In a surge of generosity she offered me the privilege of making her up for Michael Lafferty's graduation party—a party to which I had not been invited.

"Aunt Bridget says I can wear light makeup to the party," she said, "and you're so talented with cosmetics. Whenever you've done a school play it's made all the difference."

She handed me Aunt Bridget's cosmetic bag filled with pancake makeup, rouge, lipstick, mascara, and a new eyebrow pencil.

I smiled.

"Sure, I'll make you up, Kathleen. There's something I've been waiting to try on your face."

As I watched Kathleen Casey look into the mirror today, a great feeling of serenity welled up within me, evoking the tranquility I experienced as I patted the makeup on her unblemished thirteen-year-old skin. Twenty years ago I rouged her perfectly contoured cheeks and then applied lipstick. After brushing on mascara, I allowed her to survey my work in my mother's mirror. She squealed happily.

"Close your eyes now, Kathleen, so I can trace your eyebrows."

I uncapped the sharply pointed eyebrow pencil and completed the final touch of my work, two hard strokes that caused her to scream.

"Look at yourself now, Kathleen," I ordered and pushed her face close to the mirror, which reflected a white forehead inscribed in the center with a dark brown X. Then I slipped a metal hair curler onto my index finger and pointed it at her like a gun. "X marks the spot where informers are shot through the head like you're going to be right now," I said.

I'm glad no one was home because Kathleen was a fantastic screamer, almost as good as her Aunt Bridget. After she had screamed for more than two minutes I dropped the silver curler into her lap and left the room.

I was sitting on the sofa reading *Little Women* when she finally came downstairs. She had scrubbed out the X, eliminating the brown lines but leaving an ugly red welt. I don't know how she explained the blemish to her aunt or to her friends but I'm sure she didn't tell them the truth of the matter. I would have known.

After dismissing her retinue half an hour ago, Kathleen Casey—who calls herself Karen Crawford now—studied herself contentedly in the mirror of the dressing room. As I watched her admiring her own beauty, I wondered if she ever remembered the day twenty years ago when the mirror had not been so kind. I wondered if the scene in Mother's bedroom ever replayed itself in her mind. I wondered if her early adolescent pain could be reactivated as easily as mine.

Kathleen didn't recognize me when I was introduced to her as the chief makeup specialist of Studio B where she is scheduled to appear tonight on a talk show to promote her latest film. I have changed considerably in twenty years from the plain teenager she knew.

When she slid into the reclining chair in the makeup room, stretching her tanned legs in front of her, she complained of jet lag and requested a facial. Shortly after I started the treatment, she fell asleep.

When she awoke, I gave her a hand mirror to study the results of my labors. At exactly the moment she saw the dark brown X on her forehead, I pointed my right index finger at her, the finger encased in a silver hair roller, and said, "Hello, Kathleen," a name no one calls her now.

Meeting Kathleen Casey today revived my feelings of wonder at the tremendous power of words. I really think those two words, "Hello, Kathleen," started the deadly process, although I must acknowledge the power of the props—the eyebrow pencil and the hair roller.

And I must acknowledge as well the power of the bit of string I used to tie Kathleen's toes together to prevent her from returning to haunt me if she died of fright while sitting in the chair. When she gaped at me after hearing her real name, and seeing the X on her forehead and the glistening silver object in my hand, she jumped up from the chair. Impeded by the string, she fell, crashing her right temple against the porcelain sink in the dressing room. I really didn't intend to kill her. I just wanted to frighten her. But since she *has* died, I had better wash the X from her forehead and untie her toes.

Untying her toes really distresses me. But if I leave the string in place I might be charged with murder—if I take it off, I can simply say that Kathleen, I mean Karen, became dizzy and fell after getting up too quickly from the chair.

So it's off with the string, the innocent-looking but lethal string, and it's on with the consequences of unleashing Kathleen, whose spirit will be in far better condition than poor Gran's. I must accept the fact that meeting Kathleen Casey today might be a preview of some far from splendid coming attractions.



The February issue of *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine* will be on sale January 12.

Country living can instill a thirst for tranquillity . . .

A LITTLE PEACE AND QUIET by CARROLL MAYERS



When Miles and Hester Ainsley first talked of giving up their midcity apartment and buying a bungalow in a rural area downstate, the exchanges were more monologue than discussion. Miles was not enthusiastic about moving; Hester was.

"We're going to get away from here," Hester insisted. "It's becoming noisier and dirtier every day, and it's not safe to walk the streets."

"There's crime in the country too," Miles would venture.

"Of course there is, but nowhere near as much as here. And the air's clean—you can breathe."

"Honey, we're city folks, born and bred. We'd be lost in the country."

"Nonsense. It isn't as if we'd be isolated. We have the car."

"We'd still be lost."

"We can adapt. We *will* adapt."

At which stage, to avoid prolonged argument, Miles would subside. A practical man, he recognized that after a lifetime of bachelorhood his marriage to Hester had been a grievous mistake. Hester was a nag and a shrew; less than a year served to establish her essential nature. In that same year, the onset of a minor heart condition had gained for Miles an early retirement at sixty-two, but that did little to curtail Hester's carping. Five years younger than Miles and a widow, Hester simply was totally self-oriented.

Nevertheless, Miles did everything he could to make their marriage harmonious. His final accession to Hester's latest demand was a case in point.

The bungalow they purchased was on the outskirts of a small town forty miles from the city. The site could not be termed isolated—there were several homes in the immediate area—but the nearest dwelling was some five hundred feet down the road.

Hester's reference to "adapting" proved prophetic. Her domineering characteristics aside, she was a compulsive housekeeper, refurbishing and maintaining the small home occupying most of her time. She sought little contact with the few neighbors. For his part, Miles was content to putter about the tract, read, and relax. Once a week, following Hester's detailed instructions, he would drive into town for foodstuffs. He even tried some light vegetable gardening, and in less than six weeks a plot in the side yard was promising tomatoes, eggplant, peppers, and lettuce.

The move was turning out to be agreeable, until the house down the road suddenly changed hands and the new owners settled in with a dog.

The newcomers—the name on the mailbox read Henderson—were a middle-aged couple who appeared pleasant enough. The dog, a monster of uncertain parentage with Doberman pinscher predominant, was something else.

In a word, the animal was a barker. Not occasionally, at a passing stranger or the mail truck, or on whim, when seeking attention, but ceaselessly, at all hours, day and night, with no apparent justification. True, some periods of silence did occur, but they were of brief duration.

After five days Hester had had enough. "That dog!" she told Miles at breakfast. "Something has to be done about it. I hardly slept a wink last night."

Miles could but agree. "I know," he said. "But it's not so bad if you sort of tune it out."

"Tune it out!" Hester tossed her head. "I have no intention of even trying to tune it out. The animal has to be shut up. Permanently."

"A dog like that, it probably would be hard."

Her green eyes flashed. "So it would be hard—that's the Hendersons' problem. You're going over there right now and speak to them."

Miles spread his hands. "I don't want to do that—"

"Why not, for heaven's sake?"

"Well, they're our nearest neighbors. I'd hate for our relationship to get off on the wrong foot. Maybe in another week the dog will settle down."

Hester pushed aside her coffee cup. "Now you listen to me, Miles Ainsley," she snapped. "I'm not going to wait another week. I'm not going to wait another day. Either you tell them today that their animal is an infernal nuisance and must be silenced or I'll tell them myself."

"Hester—"

"You heard what I said."

Miles's shoulders slumped; he got to his feet. "All right," he yielded. "I want to get some stakes for the tomato plants in town. I'll stop there on my way home."

"You'll stop on your way in. There's no point in putting it off."

But Miles did not stop at the Hendersons' on the way into town. Nor on the way back. The possible unpleasantness of the confrontation along with the hope he'd expressed that the dog would settle down combined to dissuade him.

There was, of course, the inevitable aftermath.

"Well?" Hester demanded as he entered the door. Then her shrewd gaze narrowed. "You didn't stop."

"Look, dear—"

Her lips thinned. "I don't want to hear any excuses. I have a cake in the oven now, but as soon as it's out *I'm* going over there."

Miles set the tomato stakes on the kitchen table. The only way to divert his wife from her scathing denunciation was to broach an alternate proposal, and he had used the time driving to and from town to consider such an approach.

"I think there may be a better way," he said.

Hester's look was tight. "How?"

"I'll go to the sheriff and explain about the dog and let him talk to the Hendersons. He'll know how to do it diplomatically, as a general complaint, without mentioning our name."

She sniffed. "I couldn't care less if he did."

"I know. But don't you honestly think it will be better that way?"

"I'm not concerned with any better way," Hester told him. She cleared the stakes from the table and stood them in a corner. "But very well—as long as you understand two things: you see him today, and he speaks his piece no later than tomorrow."

That afternoon, then, Miles made a second trip to town.

Thad Thatcher, the county sheriff, was a rather corpulent individual, deliberate of speech and movement. Tilted back comfortably in his king-sized swivel chair, he heard Miles out with courteous attention.

"I gather your wife's more worked up over this dog than you are, sir."

"Well, yes, I suppose she is."

"Have words over it, did you?"

Miles flushed. "I fail to see—"

Sheriff Thatcher flapped one palm. "No offense meant. I'm just wondering if maybe Mrs. Ainsley isn't overreacting to the animal."

"Even if she is—"

"The reason I say that," the sheriff went on equably, "is because I stopped by the Hendersons' a couple of days ago on a personal matter—Mrs. Henderson and my wife are working together on a social at the church—and the dog didn't bark then. Not once, the whole time I was there."

Miles shook his head. "I didn't mean to infer the animal barks *all* the time. There are brief periods when it doesn't. By and large, though, its yapping is constant. My wife and I moved here for a little peace and quiet. We're not getting it."

"Yours is pretty much a rural area, Mr. Ainsley. Rural folks tend to favor dogs. And dogs do bark."

Miles swore mildly. "Damnit, Sheriff," he said, "all I'm asking is that you speak to those people, follow up if necessary. I don't think that's too much to ask."

Thatcher nodded. "It isn't, of course. I only wanted you to appreciate the situation." The swivel chair creaked as he shifted, indicated his paper-strewn desk top. "I'm trying to get caught up on a few things right now, but I'll get out to talk with the Hendersons the first of the week for sure." He heaved erect, smiled suddenly.

Miles stood in turn, realizing Thatcher was terminating the session. The man's deliberate approach was undoubtedly his way, but it was frustrating. There obviously was little more that Miles could say.

"I hope so," he said. "You'll let us know?"

"I certainly will," the sheriff told him. He was still smiling as Miles left.

At home, Hester's reaction was decidedly negative.

"I'll tell you why he took it so lightly," she said. "He said it himself: his wife's a friend of Mrs. Henderson. Very likely he won't trouble to speak to them at all."

Miles demurred. "I wouldn't say that—"

She turned on him. "I should have known better than to let you talk to the man. I should have gone to him myself."

"Hester—"

"Don't Hester me. Honestly, I sometimes wonder what makes you tick, Miles. And clear those plant stakes out of my kitchen."

Gathering up the bundle, Miles took them out to the garden and spent the next half hour tying up the tomato plants. As he worked, his mood slowly turned reflective. Two years ago, before he married Hester, his life had been relatively simple, with little aggravation or harassment. If only Hester wasn't—well, Hester.

A week later, Sheriff Thatcher stopped by and found Miles at work in the garden, spraying insecticide on the eggplant.

"Morning, Mr. Ainsley." The sheriff's greeting was hearty. "I thought I'd stop by and let you and your wife know how I made out with the Hendersons."

Miles put down the spray can. "Oh?"

"Yes. I spoke to them as I said I would. I didn't bring in your name, just said there'd been a complaint in the neighborhood about their dog. They were very understanding."

Thatcher paused, bemused. "As a matter of fact, it seems the dog's carrying-on had become a problem with them too. They're going to get rid of it." He stopped. "Mrs. Ainsley will appreciate that, I expect."

Miles assented. "I'm sure she will," he said. "It's unfortunate she's not here now to thank you personally."

"That's not necessary," the sheriff said.

"As it happens," Miles went on with a small smile, "I'm baching it for a week or so. My wife's gone to California."

"I see."

"Yes. Her sister's out there, recovering from an operation. Hester wanted to help her and her husband while she recuperated."

Thatcher regarded his host. "That's a coincidence. I'm originally from there myself, know the state pretty well. What's your sister-in-law's hometown?"

Miles' brow knitted. "I'm not sure. It's not very large." Then he smiled. "Wheeler Springs, that's the name."

"I know of it," the sheriff said. "Nice little place. Lived there long, have they?"

"I really couldn't say, Sheriff."

Thatcher looked over Miles's garden, then extended his hand. "I won't take up any more of your time. I hope your sister-in-law comes around all right and Mrs. Ainsley has a smooth flight back."

"Thank you."

Turning, the sheriff indicated the spray can Miles had set down. "Insects troubling you, are they?"

"To a degree," Miles said. "But I think I'm getting ahead of them."

"Good. Don't want to lose any of your crop, eh?" Thatcher looked over the garden again and indicated one particular section. "Problem there?"

Miles said, "A little. I planned on lettuce, but ants got the seeds. I turned it over; it's Swiss chard now."

"Fair enough," Thatcher said. "Well, I'll be going now. Oh—what did you say your sister-in-law's name was?"

"I didn't," Miles said. "It's—ah—Gifford. Mrs. John Gifford."

"Expect your wife home soon, Mr. Ainsley?"

"I can't honestly say," Miles said. "I guess it will depend on how soon her sister is back on her feet."

"Of course."

Miles saw Thatcher to the front gate. "I appreciate what you did about the dog," he said. "Stop by again."

The sheriff touched his hat. "I likely will, sir," he said pleasantly.

As it developed, it was several weeks before Thatcher returned. Miles again was spraying the garden when he drove up late one afternoon. He waved recognition and invited the sheriff to join him.

"I was in the vicinity and thought I'd stop," the sheriff offered. "Everything work out all right with the dog?"

Miles assented. "They got rid of it two days after you were here."

"I'm glad to hear it. I know you and Mrs. Ainsley were upset—" Thatcher broke off. "You know," he went on after a long moment, "when I told you that day I'd likely be back—well, frankly, I had something in mind—"

Miles regarded him with some curiosity. "Is that so?"

"Yes." The sheriff halted again, inhaled. "You see, you as much as admitted you'd quarreled with your wife about the dog. And even before you came to see me my wife mentioned that your neighbors around here considered Mrs. Ainsley rather—difficult." Thatcher drew another breath. "If it hadn't been for the dog, I'd've had no occasion to come out here to talk with you, but when I did I noticed a few things. I—well, I thought perhaps you'd gotten fed up."

Disbelief flooded Miles; he couldn't be hearing correctly. He placed the spray can on a bench he had installed alongside the house and blinked uncertainly at the sheriff. "Are you saying you suspected I'd done away with Hester?" he ventured, and when Thatcher made no immediate rejoinder he cried, "But that's absurd!"

The sheriff made a helpless gesture. "I didn't think so at the time. I mean"—he glanced ruefully at the spray can—"there was that insecticide you could've used as poison, and the fact that you'd dug up that part of the plot there, and your story about your wife's sudden trip to California and her indefinite return."

Miles could only gape at Thatcher. "But that's terrible—"

The sheriff's concurrence was humble. "I know that now. But I felt I had to go ahead and check out your story. I let you think I recognized the town of Wheeler Springs, if in fact you weren't making it up. But

when I contacted the police out there and asked them to verify off the record if there was a family named Gifford and if they had a houseguest—

"You checked if Hester actually was there!"

"I had to, Mr. Ainsley. Put yourself in my position. Of course, when I learned she was—"

Miles's head was spinning. It was preposterous!

Thatcher cleared his throat. "I didn't have to tell you any of this, sir, but I felt obliged to. I—I'm sorry—"

When the lawman was gone Miles slumped on the bench. His mind was numb.

"Miles!" Hester's strident call echoed from the side kitchen-window. "Supper in ten minutes. And wipe your feet. Last night you tracked mud all over my floor."

Miles sighed, started to rise, then slowly sat back down. What was the phrase he'd used in Thatcher's office that day? A little peace and quiet . . .

His heart began to beat faster. The fact that Hester had a sister in California was now established. Another visit out there—say, six months from now—and Thatcher would readily accept Hester's indefinite absence, if indeed he questioned it at all. And the garden would be frozen over . . .

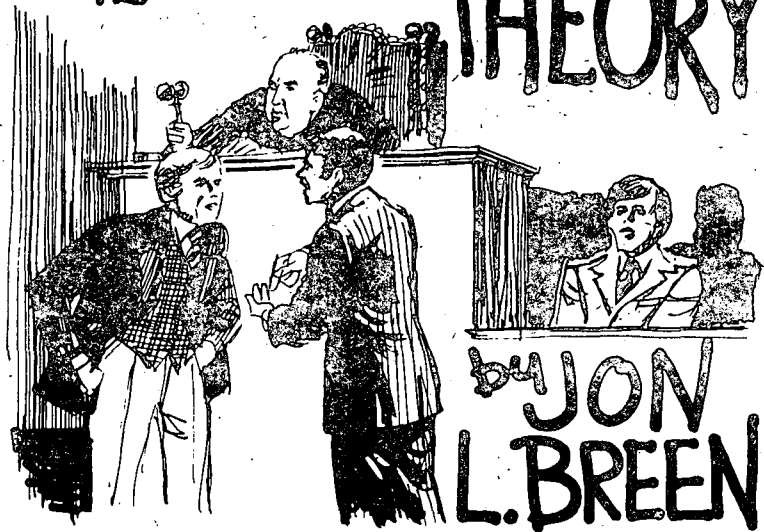
"Miles! I don't intend to call you again. You can eat it cold."

Miles stirred himself. "I'm coming, dear," he answered. It was evident that Hester was annoyed, but Miles ceased to be concerned as he went into the house.



The word "auteur" may come from the French, but all auteur film directors do not come from France . . .

THE AUTEUR THEORY



by JON
L. BREEN

Martin Boyle had just returned from the screening of a particularly inept skin flick when he received Vince Kowalski's call. Although he and the lawyer were old acquaintances, the initial polite small talk didn't fool him for a minute. The call had to be about their mutual friend Gary Whitwood, the movie director who would go on trial for murder in a few days.

"Look, Vince," Martin said, interrupting some idle pleasantries, "get

to the point. How is Gary doing? I haven't talked to him in a week or two."

"Well, he's been pretty busy finishing up *Close of Darkness*—they just finished shooting today." Whitwood had been allowed to complete his latest film while on bail and awaiting trial.

"I don't know how he could concentrate on making a film. Well, how's the defense shaping up? How does it look?"

"Bad. They have a strong circumstantial case, Marty. Very strong. Gary says he didn't do it, and I believe him, but getting the jury to believe him is going to take some doing. They don't know Gary the way we do, and my job is to make them know him."

"Vince, if there's anything I can do to help, you know . . ."

"That's what you said before, Marty, and that's why I called. I think you *can* help. I'd like you to testify for the defense at Gary's trial. I have an idea that might help him. Frankly, I'm at the point where I'll try anything."

"Sure, Vince, I'll be glad to. But I don't have any evidence to offer, unless I'm some sort of character witness. Is that what you had in mind?"

"Yeah, sort of. Marty, I'd like to talk to you about it in some detail. Are you free this evening or do you have to go look at some turkey?"

"No, I've done my turkey-watching for the day. A thing called *Deep Navel*."

"Great title, but it sounds like a . . ."

"That's what it is, and the title's the best thing about it. *Onlooker* wants me to cover the whole movie scene from top to bottom, and I thought a skin flick might be sort of fun for a change. But most of the early scenes are in shadows, and when the skin finally appears you wish they'd go back in the shadows—you know what I mean?"

"No, I never go to that kind of picture. Look, Marty, is it O.K. if I drop in around eight? It shouldn't take long."

"Sure, Vince. I'll see you then."

Martin Boyle hung up the phone. The invitation to testify surprised him. Maybe Vince wanted to have a film critic appear for the defense because the man Gary Whitwood was accused of killing had been a film critic—Grover Blunt, found viciously knifed to death in his hotel room a couple of days after his review of Gary Whitwood's most recent picture had appeared in print. The review had been a scathing pan.

It was absurd to think a director would kill a critic over a bad review, but the weapon had been traced to Gary and he'd been seen in the hotel by several witnesses around the time of the murder. Gary claimed he had come to the hotel to see Blunt but had changed his mind and never gone to the critic's room.

Bad as it looked, Martin couldn't bring himself to believe that Gary had done it. Gary was a warm, understanding, low-key sort of guy, not a murderer. That time when he'd found out about Martin's affair with Judy, his wife, for example. The three of them had talked it out like civilized and sophisticated people, and their friendship hadn't been affected at all. Of course, ending the affair had been the only decent thing to do under the circumstances, and both Martin and Judy had looked elsewhere.

Yes, as he'd told Vince, Martin Boyle would do anything to help Gary Whitwood out of the jam he was in, and looked forward to the lawyer's visit to find out the plan of action.

It was a full month before Martin Boyle actually took the stand at the trial of Gary Whitwood. At that, the action was going along at a brisk pace for such a highly publicized murder case, and the defense was scheduled to wrap up a day or two after Martin's testimony. Things had gone about as expected, the prosecution presenting a strong circumstantial case, with Gary's testimony a simple denial. The defense had been unable to explain how Gary's carving knife came to be used in the crime.

Martin felt his hand shaking slightly as he took the oath, but he had a good actor's confidence he'd do all right once the questioning began.

"State your name, please, for the record," said Vince Kowalski pleasantly.

"Martin Boyle."

"And your occupation?"

"Film critic."

"Mr. Boyle, would you kindly tell the court and the jury something about your experience as a film critic—that is, what would qualify you to speak as an expert about film?"

Hendricks, the prosecutor, rose and said mildly, "Your Honor, I fail to see what bearing the witness's credentials as a movie critic can have on this case."

"Your Honor," Vince replied, "my client is a well known filmmaker. Mr. Boyle's view of his films has a bearing on my defense."

"Truly," Hendricks countered, "I fail to see what the quality or lack of same of Mr. Whitwood's pictures can possibly have to do with his defense against a charge of homicide."

The judge said, "I wish to give the defense every latitude. I trust you can make the connection clear, Mr. Kowalski?"

"I hope to, Your Honor."

"Proceed."

"Mr. Boyle, you were about to tell us something about your qualifications."

"Well, I reviewed films for my university daily, then spent several years on a limited-circulation film journal called *Montage* and one year as movie reviewer for *Lady's Day*, my services there abruptly terminated because I didn't like *The Sound of Music* very much. I am currently film critic for *Onlooker* magazine. I have done books on the films of Lowell Sherman, Ford Beebe, René Clair, and H. Bruce Humberstone and contributed . . ."

"If it will help speed things along, Your Honor," Hendricks chimed in, "I am more than willing to stipulate Mr. Boyle's experience and astuteness as a critic. I, too, had my reservations about *The Sound of Music*—all those appalling children . . ."

Boyle caught a look of dismay on the face of one juror. Cracks, like that wouldn't help the prosecution much. Perhaps the Assistant D.A. could be trapped into knocking Mary Tyler Moore.

"I think we may confine our discussion to the defendant's films, Mr. Hendricks," the judge said. "Proceed, Mr. Kowalski."

"Thank you, Your Honor, and thank *you*, Mr. Hendricks. Now, Mr. Boyle, are you familiar with the films directed by my client, Gary Whitwood?"

"Yes, I am."

"Do you believe, Mr. Boyle, in the auteur theory?"

"Sometimes. It depends."

"Would you explain to the court what the auteur theory is?"

"To put it briefly, the auteur theory holds that the director is the author of the film and that the total output of a given film director expresses certain continuing motifs and a consistent world view, just as the total output of a novelist does."

"And when does this theory not apply?"

"In situations where the director is a hired hand and does not have full control over his material, as was often the case in the major Hollywood studios."

"Do you believe my client Gary Whitwood has full control over his product?"

"As I understand it, he does."

"Objection, Your Honor," Hendricks said. "That is a conclusion of the witness. Though why I'm objecting on that ground I can't imagine since this whole line of questioning seems quite irrelevant to me."

"That's two objections, Mr. Hendricks," His Honor said. "To the first one, I say objection sustained and direct that the answer be stricken on grounds of incompetence. To the second implied objection, I say overruled, trusting that counsel for the defense will soon connect it up."

"Mr. Boyle, let me phrase my question another way. Do Mr. Whitwood's films express a certain consistent viewpoint?"

"Yes, I believe they do."

"And how would you characterize that viewpoint?"

"I would say, as a pacifist viewpoint. A belief in non-violence as a means to achieve desired goals."

"Would you say that this view is typical of most commercial filmmakers today?"

"Decidedly not. Whitwood has been swimming against the tide."

"In Mr. Whitwood's recent films, have you seen opportunities for violence?"

"Certainly. They have been crime films and have presented many opportunities for explicit violence."

"But always the opportunities have been avoided?"

"That is correct."

"And most of the other contemporary filmmakers dealing with similar crime themes would, in your view, have resorted to violence?"

"Yes."

"Why would a filmmaker desire to tone down violence in his films?"

"Objection, Your Honor. Is Mr. Boyle to be expected to read the minds of countless movie directors?"

"I believe Mr. Boyle's expertise as established should qualify him to answer without resort to telepathy. You may answer, Mr. Boyle."

"Well, to get a more favorable rating, perhaps—a G or a PG, say, instead of an R."

"And what were the ratings of Mr. Whitwood's last three pictures?"

"R."

"Meaning that unaccompanied children cannot attend?"

"Yes."

"And the most restrictive rating other than an X?"

"Correct. And they don't generally give X's for violence."

"Why the R, Mr. Boyle, if there was no violence in the films?"

"Mr. Whitwood has never been shy about sex, nudity, or strong language."

"So the lack of explicit violence could not have been motivated by the ratings?"

"No."

"Your Honor," said Hendricks in a weary tone, "this discussion of movies and ratings is all very interesting, but where is it getting us?"

"Is that an objection, Mr. Hendricks?"

"Just a question, Your Honor."

"Perhaps with fewer rhetorical questions we'll find out. Mr. Kowalski?"

"Thank you, Your Honor. Mr. Boyle, my client is accused of a very violent, very bloody crime. Grover Blunt was found dead in a pool of his own blood, the victim of multiple stab wounds in the face, chest, stomach, and legs. Is there any precedent for this brutal violence in the films of Gary Whitwood?"

"None."

"No scenes of such bloodiness and goriness?"

"None."

"And in the films of other present-day commercial directors?"

"Many. Far too many for queasy chaps like myself."

"Could a man of Whitwood's sensitivity, his abhorrence of violence, have committed such a crime?"

Prosecutor Hendricks seemed truly aroused for the first time. "Your Honor, I do object. Surely Mr. Boyle is not qualified to give a conclusion on such a question. He is not a psychiatrist."

"Objection sustained."

"Let me put it this way. Could a murderer capable of such a bloody and heinous crime, who was also a film director of crime films, find

ample opportunity in the present cinematic climate to put such murderous interests on celluloid?"

"Objected to on the same grounds."

"Not quite the same situation. Overruled."

"Yes, of course he could."

"And does it not seem reasonable that a murderer so inclined would take such an opportunity to vent his violent nature on film?"

"Objection!"

"Sustained."

"No more questions." Kowalski sat down.

Hendricks rose and sighed deeply. "Your Honor, I don't know where to begin. I have never seen such a ridiculous defense."

"Objection!" cried Kowalski, shooting back to his feet.

"Mr. Hendricks, please. The time for closing statements will come. Do you wish to ask the witness any questions?"

"I do indeed. Mr. Boyle, do you think the murderer could be a director of Walt Disney movies who killed because he had no chance to sublimate his hostility on film?"

"That's a ridiculous question, Your Honor," said Kowalski.

"It's not the first," Hendricks said under his breath but audible to the jury.

"Mr. Hendricks, your question is blatantly facetious, apart from calling for a speculation on the part of the witness. It will be stricken."

"Mr. Boyle, are you a close personal friend of the defendant?"

"Yes, I am," Martin replied without hesitation.

"Would you like to help him get off?"

"My purpose in testifying is to tell the truth to the best of my knowledge and ability."

"Do you usually find that directors' films reflect their private personalities?"

"Not always."

"Are directors of comedies usually funny men?"

"Sometimes. Often not."

"Are men who make violent films generally violent men?"

"No, not usually. In my experience."

"Are makers of family films full of sweetness and light?"

"No, they're often quite cynical."

"And are makers of pacifist films usually themselves non-violent?"

"Yes."

"How do you explain this strange difference?"

"Purveyors of comedy, violence, and homely sentimentality are usually working in established commercial grooves, turning out films in certain ways that are known to be palatable to the public. Pacifistic filmmakers on the other hand are not moving in the usual ways. They are inevitably going against the stream, offering non-commercial approaches when the opportunity for the usual mixture presents itself. To do that, their motives must be something other than the financial aspect that motivates most filmmakers. When a man takes a position in opposition to his best monetary interests, it says something for the sincerity of his beliefs."

"Oh. Have Gary Whitwood's films been box-office failures then?"

"Several have."

"But most of them have been successful, haven't they?"

"Oh, yes."

"Why?"

"He's a very gifted director. He makes good films."

"And he's commercial?"

"In many ways."

"And he's in his profession to make money?"

"Objection, Your Honor. Mr. Boyle can't be expected to know the defendant's motives."

"Can't he?" Hendricks responded sarcastically. "I thought that was what this was all about. Mr. Boyle opening up Mr. Whitwood's skull and telling us what a pussycat lives inside there."

"Your Honor, I must strenuously object to this continuous line of abuse from the prosecutor."

"Sustained. The question and Mr. Hendricks' remarks will be stricken and the jury is instructed to disregard them."

"Let's say this, Mr. Boyle," said Hendricks. "Mr. Whitwood's films are making money?"

"Undoubtedly."

"So his non-violent approach is making him money?"

"Not necessarily. If his films had explicit killings and maimings, he might be reaching a wider audience and making more money."

"Mr. Boyle, on the night of Mr. Blunt's murder was the defendant directing a movie?"

"Objection, Your Honor. Mr. Boyle can't be expected to know what Mr. Whitwood was doing on the night of Mr. Blunt's death."

"Sustained."

"Mr. Boyle, is it not possible for a man to believe one thing intellectually and be driven to another in a time of severe emotional and mental stress?"

"Objection, Your Honor. Now Mr. Hendricks seems to be expecting psychiatric judgments from the witness."

"Sustained."

"Let me ask you this then, Mr. Boyle. Do all the movie directors you know who express a certain point of view through their films live up to that point of view in their daily activities as you have observed them?"

"No."

"You have seen makers of very moral movies do immoral things?"

"Yes."

"And have you seen makers of non-violent movies do violent things?"

"No, but I have seen makers of violent films shrink from violence in real life."

"Have you ever had encounters with directors of movies to which you have given bad reviews, Mr. Boyle?"

"Of course. Frequently."

"Have they ever expressed any anger to you?"

"Yes, that's to be expected."

"Have they acted violently toward you?"

"Not usually."

"But sometimes?"

"Not murderously violent."

"Isn't it true, Mr. Boyle, that Spencer Kurtzman once attacked you in a New York nightclub after reading your review of one of his films?"

"Well, he'd had quite a bit to drink . . ."

"And subjected you to a violent attack?"

"I guess you could call it violent."

"Wouldn't you call breaking your nose violent, Mr. Boyle?"

"Yes, I would."

"So film directors have been known to react violently to criticism of their art?"

"Yes, but not Gary Whitwood in my experience."

"Well, perhaps your experience and Grover Blunt's experience have not been quite the . . ."

Kowalski shouted, "Your Honor, this is outrageous!"

"You know better, Mr. Hendricks. Jury will disregard the last remark."

"Mr. Boyle, you are a close personal friend of Gary Whitwood, is that correct?"

"Yes, I've said so."

"Have you ever panned one of his films?"

"Mr. Hendricks, my friendship for a director has no bearing on my . . ."

"Please, I am not impugning your integrity, Mr. Boyle, just asking a question. Have you ever panned a Gary Whitwood film?"

"Not precisely panned one, no."

"Have you ever given a bad review to one of his films?"

"Objection, Your Honor. That's the same question."

Hendricks explained, "I want an unqualified answer, Your Honor. Mr. Boyle has not given me one. The term 'panned' might be too subject to vague definitions to get a suitable response."

"Overruled. Witness may answer."

"No, I never have."

"Mr. Boyle, does the defendant have many friends among movie critics?"

"I don't think I can say. I don't know all the defendant's friends."

"Let me ask you this. Do you know of any other movie critics, besides yourself, who have formed a personal friendship with Gary Whitwood?"

"Well, yes. One."

"Who was that one?"

"Grover Blunt."

After pausing for effect, Hendricks answered, "Grover Blunt, the deceased. Do you know of any other movie critics, other than Grover Blunt and yourself, who have been close friends of the defendant?"

"No, but that doesn't mean . . ."

"Then, to your knowledge, Mr. Boyle, the situation of a close personal friend of the defendant delivering a vicious attack on one of the defendant's films—films which the defendant might reasonably have looked on as his children, to be defended from attack—this situation,

Grover Blunt's damning review, was a unique one?"

"Your Honor, that is objected to. It is outside the witness's scope of knowledge and sounds more like counsel's closing argument than a question."

"Sustained."

After more trips over the same ground, Martin Boyle's testimony was concluded and with it the case for the defense. In their summations, Hendricks emphasized the strength of his circumstantial case and expressed the view that the attack of a close friend on one of his "children" caused Gary Whitwood to act in a way ordinarily foreign to him while Kowalski emphasized that the circumstantial case was only that and that certainly the non-violent character of the defendant as brought out in the testimony constituted a more than reasonable doubt.

The jury agreed with Kowalski and after several hours of deliberation they found Gary Whitwood not guilty.

Several weeks after the trial, Martin Boyle, home from the screening of a disaster film worthy of the name, received a phone call from Gary Whitwood, whom he had not seen since the director's memorable acquittal party.

"Hello, Gary. How are you?"

"Fine, Marty, fine. And you?"

"Fine, just fine."

"I saw your review of *Close of Darkness*."

"Yeah, well, I . . ." Martin trailed off in embarrassment.

"Hey, it's all right, kid. I know you have to call 'em like you see 'em."

"Gary, I know you must have had a hard time concentrating on the picture with everything else you had on your mind, the trial and all, and I just thought for once your resistance to inherent societal violence reflected a retreat from reality into a world where everybody is as reasonable and understanding as you are. I just thought . . . Well, you know what I thought. I wrote it."

"And I wouldn't have you do anything else, Marty."

"No."

"Look, we haven't seen much of you lately, kid. How's about a weekend on the old sailboat like we used to do, just the three of us? It's all stocked up with our best booze and eats, and Judy would really

like to see you again."

"Oh, well, sure, Gary. When?"

"See you about eight this Saturday morning at the marina, kid, usual place. Judy can't wait. Neither can I."

"Terrific, Gary. Thanks."

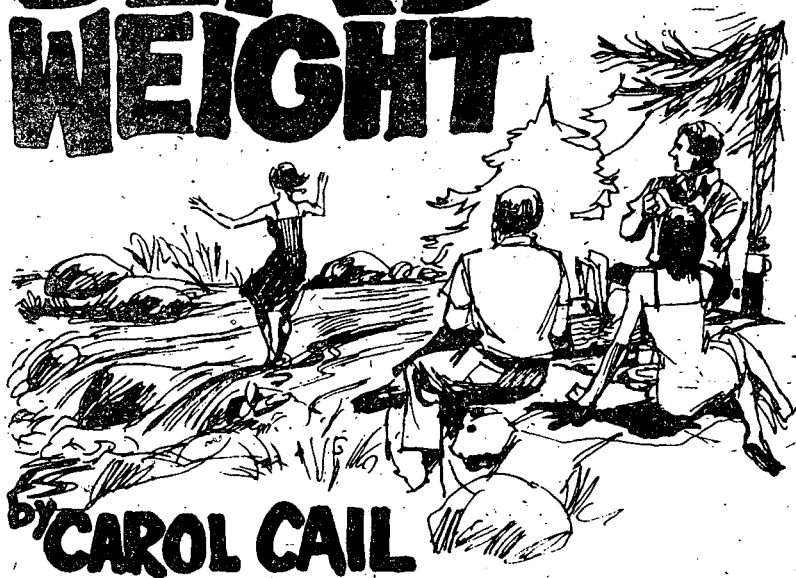
Hanging up, Martin chided himself. He'd almost turned the invitation down, and what a slap in the face that would have been to Gary. Such a warm, understanding, *civilized* guy.

But somehow he wasn't looking forward to the weekend.



Strange what can trigger violence on a beautiful spring day...

DEAD WEIGHT



Yes sir, I'm ready to tell you about it. Should I go slow for the lady to write it all down?

My name is James Edward Brach, and I live at 1500 Jewel Street, 4A, Boulder, Colorado 80302. I'm thirty-one years old. I've never been arrested, and I wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for Rita going on a diet.

Rita and I were married in 1969. She was fat then. She'd always

been fat. Her whole family was fat. If I'd wanted a skinny woman, I'd have married Mattie Drinkman.

Rita and I grew up together right here. First thing out of high school, I started driving a milk route for Mountain Dairy and she worked as a nurse's aide at the hospital, mostly night shift so we could be together days.

Everything was going along fine until a couple of years ago she got to wondering why she hadn't got pregnant and wishing she would. She finally worried herself into seeing a doctor, and he had to tell her she couldn't have a baby till she lost some weight. Ask me, I don't think he knew where kids come from. Anyway, that's what triggered her being dissatisfied with her size.

And then she just plain envied other women's figures. She'd stare at the models in magazines and the show girls on TV. "I'd give anything to look like that," she'd say.

First I thought it was a phase she'd get over, and I'd kid her, like, "You don't need to lose weight, just grow taller."

But she had this bee in her bonnet for certain. Last fall she checked out a stack of library books by all these so-called experts. Then she bought a little scales, and before she'd put a bite of anything in her mouth she'd weigh it and write what it was in a notebook.

She turned into a downright crank about eating. I'd have to eat my midnight-snack and take-home pizza by myself, or watch her nibble on celery while I ate the five-course meal she'd fixed.

I used to bring home ice cream left over from the morning's route, and we'd split a half gallon between us before we hit the sack. Now she wouldn't touch it. Not only that, she wouldn't even keep me company while I ate; she'd traipse off to bed without me. She got to be a real barrel of laughs.

Well, of course, she lost weight. She went from 175 to 119. She bought herself a whole new closetful of clothes. She started wearing makeup and curling her hair.

To make matters worse, people were flattering her about how nice she looked. Men too. Some of the guys I work with razzed me about her doing it for some other man. They went so far as to suggest I go on a diet if I wanted to keep her.

My people are all heavy built. Big bones run in the family.

Well, anyway, I took the kidding good-naturedly and didn't let on

how I really felt. I'd say,

"Sure, I'm going to shed some pounds before she runs away with the milkman." And they'd laugh.

But I tell you, when I saw Duane Gibbs bending over her putting his mouth on hers, I felt sick, and all I could think of was, "So this is what dieting gets you, Mrs. Brach."

Duane was one of our so-called friends who egged Rita on, whistling at her when he'd see her, which was often since our apartments face. And he's home at all hours. He does accounting. He calls it being self-employed; I call it cushy.

O.K., today.

Today's one of those blue-sky spring-in-the-Rockies beauties. That's Rita's description. It was her idea to go on a picnic.

Every year we've gone on lots of picnics, up Left Hand Canyon usually. Last one was last September, before the diet thing, so the hamper was full of fried chicken, baked beans, potato salad, beer, the works. Today her idea of a feast was scrawny little cold-cut sandwiches, a few pieces of fruit, and lemonade—hardly worth the trip.

We've got this favorite spot, with just room for one car to park by the highway, so if you get it you know you'll have that stretch of the creek to yourself private. We got it today, Rita and me and Duane Gibbs and his wife Lois, who came along with us.

The creek was running fast and cold, slamming over the rocks so loud we had to yell to each other. It gave me a headache. I still got it. But we had a pretty good time until Rita got it into her head to wade across the creek.

She'd done it plenty of times before, but always before she had 170-some pounds' ballast. This time that old creek picked her up like a leaf and flung her sideways about five yards into a boulder. You could hear the crack when her head hit. God, my head hurts worse just thinking about it.

Two flights down, stupefied by shock and a tranquilizer, Lois Gibbs was making a statement too.

"Yes, her death was an accident. The four of us were sitting on the bank, and Rita jumped up, like on a whim, and took off her shoes and waded out into the current. But it was too strong. It washed her off her feet and threw her headfirst against a boulder. She wedged long

enough for Duane and Jim to get there and pull her out and right away Duane started mouth-to-mouth resuscitation on her.

"Before I knew what was happening, Jim burst into tears, grabbed up a big rock, and smashed it down on the back of Duane's head three times.

"I couldn't move. My legs were paralyzed, like in a nightmare. Until he turned to me with a terrible look in his eyes and said, 'You! You encouraged her to diet too!' Then—then I ran."



To Lucas it was just money not in the bank . . .

OPEN TILL NINE



by **JAMES HOLDING**

It couldn't have happened at a worse time—Wednesday evening, when almost every store on Westbridge Mall stayed open until nine o'clock.

John Lucas, manager of the Westbridge Mall branch of Citizens National Bank, had just lit his after-dinner cigar when his telephone rang. Cindy, his teenage daughter, flew to answer it. In a disappointed tone she said, "Daddy, it's for you."

He took the phone. "Yes?" he said around his cigar.

"Mr. Lucas? This is Jeff Worley, Streets of Paris."

"Oh, hello, Jeff," Lucas said, surprised. Worley and his Streets of Paris Dress Shop on the Mall were customers of his bank. "What's on your mind?"

"Something's wrong with your night depository, Mr. Lucas. I couldn't make my deposit."

Lucas removed the cigar from his mouth. "What's wrong with the night depository?"

"The lock's jammed, I guess. I couldn't get my key to work. Couldn't even get it in the keyhole."

Lucas glanced at his watch, thinking quickly. Eight forty-five. Worley had probably closed his shop at eight-thirty and was therefore the first of the Mall merchants to attempt to use the bank's night-depository box. Between now and ten o'clock, Lucas knew, a score of others would be lining up to do the same as they closed their stores and reckoned up the day's receipts. If there was something wrong with the night depository at his bank, it would be a real mess.

He said, "Thanks for calling me, Jeff. I'll get on it right away. Meanwhile, what are you doing with your deposit?"

"Nothing yet. I came back to my store to call you. What *shall* I do with it? Keep it here in the shop till the bank opens tomorrow?"

"No, listen, I'm going to call Clancy, our security officer. He lives above Moore's Hardware Store right there on the Mall. He'll go down to the bank and accept your deposit and any others that come in until I can get there myself."

"O.K.," Worley said. "But what if you can't reach him?"

"Then I'll call you back within five minutes and we'll try something else."

Fortunately, Clancy was at home. He answered his telephone on the third ring. Lucas told him about Worley's call. "Go down to the bank right away and stand by the depository and take charge of any night deposits that show up until I get there, will you, Clancy? Sorry to bother you after hours like this, but all our customers know you personally, so there won't be any trouble in that respect. O.K.?"

"Sure, Mr. Lucas." Clancy tried to sound pleasant and accommodating. "I'm just watching TV. No sweat. What's wrong with the depository?"

"Vandalism, probably," Lucas said in disgust, "or maybe nothing at

all. Worley may have tried the wrong key. But we'd better check it out. So get down there right away. I'll join you as soon as I can make it." Lucas lived in Oakmont, forty minutes from Westbridge Mall.

"I'm on my way," said Clancy.

"And Clancy. If the cops on the beat come by while you're there, tell them what's up. They'll help you keep an eye on things till I arrive."

"Right." Clancy hung up and yawned. He was a burly muscular man with a paunch, an incipient double chin, and tender feet from thirty years as a bank guard. He scrubbed a hand across his craggy face and lumbered over to turn off his TV set. Going into the bedroom of his tiny apartment, he took his uniform jacket from the closet, hitched it on, and clipped his holster to his belt. Then he took an empty paper bag from the shelf under the telephone table and, carrying it folded flat under his arm, he descended the steep stairs to the Mall.

He reached the night-depository box built into the front wall of the dark bank building at ten minutes before nine. He took up his station before the box, trying to look solid, dependable, and bankerlike. He gave the depository box a quick inspection which revealed nothing, since he had no key with which to test the lock.

From where he stood, he could see the whole length of the Mall. Hundreds of shoppers were moving in and out of the stores and the huge parking lot was still half filled with cars, but everything would be closing up tight in a few minutes.

Jeff Worley cut across the Mall from the Streets of Paris Dress Shop to where Clancy stood. "Hey, Clancy!" he greeted him. "Fast work!"

"I got here quick as I could after Mr. Lucas called. He said you couldn't open the depository."

"No way. Here, try it yourself, Clancy." Worley offered him his key.

Clancy tried without success to insert the key into the depository keyhole. "You sure this is the right key, Mr. Worley?"

"Of course I'm sure! It's got the bank's tag on it. So take my deposit, will you, Clancy, and let me get the hell home. It's been a long day."

Clancy held his paper bag open and Worley dropped in his envelope of cash and checks. "Goodnight, Mr. Worley," Clancy said. "I'll take care of this until Mr. Lucas arrives."

"Good night." Worley went off toward the parking lot.

At eight fifty-five Brannigan and Petrillo, the patrolmen assigned to

the Mall, drifted by in the rapidly thinning crowd of shoppers. Petrillo saw Clancy leaning against the wall of the bank and came over. "Hi, Clancy," he said. "You boys running a graveyard shift now?"

Clancy shook his head. "The damn depository's busted. Mr. Lucas is coming down, but he told me to take the night deposits till he gets here."

"He's paying you overtime I hope," said Petrillo, one of the leading lights in the local F.O.P.

Clancy grinned at him. "You better believe it."

"If you run into any trouble, yell," Petrillo said. "We'll hear you."

"Thanks. I'll be all right." Clancy touched his holster.

By ten after nine, the shopping crowds had melted away like magic. The parking lot was empty except for a few cars near The Buttery, which stayed open all night, and a few more by the 24-hour drugstore at the Mall's northeast corner. Lights were going out now in Sears, Penney's, the supermarket, all over the Mall, as the stores closed their doors and their salespeople left. Clancy was kept very busy for twenty minutes then, taking deposits and explaining that the night depository was out of service.

At nine-thirty, Mr. Lucas arrived in his Continental Versailles and parked in his own labeled slot behind the bank. He hurried around into the Mall where Clancy kept his vigil and said breathlessly, "Here I am, Clancy. Everything O.K.?"

"Everything's fine, Mr. Lucas." Clancy indicated his brown paper bag, now bulging with the night deposits of the Mall merchants. "I'd say almost everybody's accounted for."

"Good," said Lucas. He relieved Clancy of the paper bag full of currency and checks. "I won't forget this, Clancy. Is the depository really out of order?"

"I tried to open it with Mr. Worley's key and several others. No go."

"I'll call the locksmith in the morning." Lucas looked up the now nearly deserted Mall. "Let's get these deposits inside where they'll be safe."

"Right," said Clancy. He followed Lucas into the bank through a rear door which the manager opened with a long thin key after doing something mysterious to prevent the bank's burglar alarms from being activated by their entrance.

Lucas led the way through the gloom of the main banking room to

his private office. There he switched on the lights, sat down at his desk, and dumped the contents of the paper bag onto his blotter. "Looks like a big night for the Mall," he said at the sight of the thick deposit envelopes. He began to arrange them across his desk in near alphabetical order. "Why do you think the depository wouldn't work?" he asked Clancy, his hands busy.

Clancy said, "The keyhole was blocked with toothpicks, sir—wooder toothpicks driven into the keyhole and broken off short."

"Toothpicks! What a damn fool trick! Who would do a thing like that?"

Clancy cleared his throat. "I would, sir," he said quietly.

Lucas slowly raised his eyes from the deposit envelopes and looked into the muzzle of Clancy's gun, pointed directly at his head.

"Stand up and get away from the desk," Clancy said. "Keep your knee away from that alarm switch under your desk." He motioned with the gun.

Lucas cautiously arose and moved several paces away from his desk.

"I blocked the depository keyhole this afternoon when I was locking up," Clancy went on. "I had it all worked out beforehand."

"For God's sake!" said Lucas explosively. "Why?"

"Because my wife's illness ate up our savings before she died last year. And you refused to let me take early retirement from the bank. And you even rejected my request for a raise last month. So I decided to take matters into my own hands and—what's that phrase you're always using?—plan my own financial future." Clancy gestured at the deposit envelopes spread out on Lucas's desk. "And that's it right there, Mr. Lucas. My financial future." He laughed.

Lucas closed his eyes as though in pain, but principally to shut out the sight of Clancy's gun muzzle which looked as wide as a tunnel's mouth to him. "I'm sorry, Clancy," he said, "truly sorry that you feel like this. Won't you reconsider? You can't get away with it, you know."

"I have got away with it! I'm going to truss you up like a Christmas turkey and leave you here until morning, Mr. Lucas. And by then, I'll be long gone with all these lovely night deposits."

"I see." Lucas opened his eyes. "Well, it was a good plan, Clancy. But I fear you were a little careless. The police should be here—" he looked at his watch—"in about thirty seconds."

Clancy laughed again, derisively. "Excuse the expression, Mr.

Lucas, but that's a crock if I ever heard one!"

"Five minutes ago," said Lucas, "I activated the alarm under my desk. It rings in the police station, as you know."

Clancy felt a small worm of uneasiness uncoil in his belly. "Five minutes ago?" he said. "You didn't suspect a thing five minutes ago."

"Oh, but I did! I knew what you were up to before you drew your gun, Clancy. The minute I dumped your paper bag on my desk."

The gun muzzle wavered, then steadied again. "What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about the pencilled notation on the side of your paper bag. It seemed very unlikely that anyone could have written it but you."

Clancy's uneasiness became a premonition of disaster. It was all he could do to force himself to say, "What notation?"

Lucas opened his eyes and kept them open. "The notation you no doubt jotted down on the bag when you were making your getaway arrangements. Don't you remember it, Clancy?"

Clancy remembered it now, too late and all too well. Scribbled down when he made his reservation over the phone. "Rio flight 1427—dep. 11:30 P.M. Sept. 14."

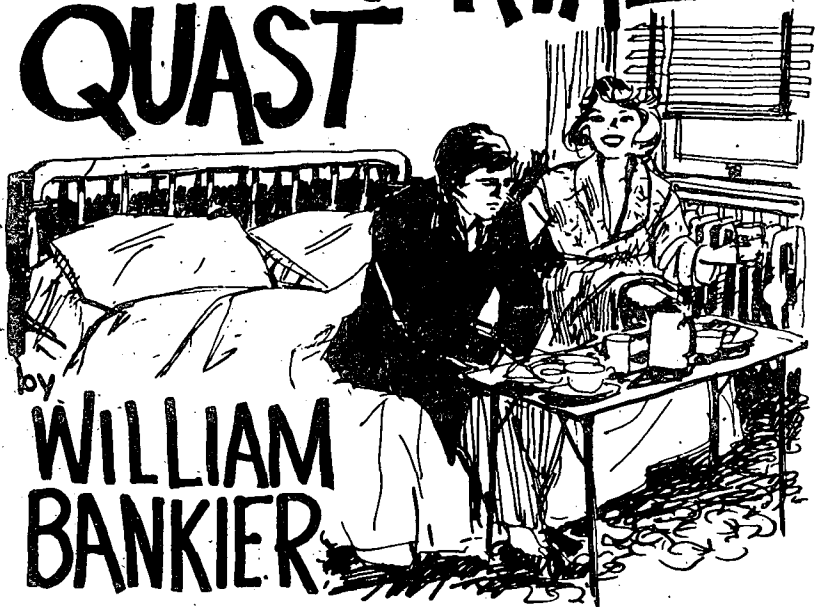
He shrugged his big shoulders and said in a tired voice, "I guess you were right not to give me a raise, Mr. Lucas. In your place, I wouldn't give a stupid bastard like me a raise either."

Moving like an old man, Clancy put away his gun. Then he sank heavily into a chair to wait for the police.



If anybody did it his way, Quast did . . .

THE IMMORTAL QUAST



by
**WILLIAM
BANKIER**

Norman Quast woke up at five o'clock in the morning, having been struck in the face by Vera. It was unintentional, the result of one of her frantic changes of position in her sleep. He got up and went into the bathroom to see if his nose was bleeding. It was not.

This sort of calamity could not have happened with Beverly. She used to curl up on her side when she slept and scarcely moved at all. That was typical of his former wife; she caused no disturbances, made

no waves. Such behavior had its advantages and Quast thought for a while that he would go on living that way forever. But that was before he met Vera.

Quast's home was in Montreal in those days. After the divorce, he tried New York, then London, and, later, New Orleans, where he ended up being chased and shot at by a crowd of cops. And all because he and Vera Logan kidnapped her young brother with the idea of schlepping some-ransom money out of her millionaire father.

Now they were back in New York State and Quast was standing in front of the medicine-cabinet mirror in their hole-in-the-wall apartment. He looked at his face and wondered how it was that sun-tanned skin could reveal a pallor. His eyelids drooped, as did one side of his mouth. The slack lip was the result of a two-hour session many years ago with a French-Canadian dentist who had finally removed a stubborn wisdom tooth by sawing it into pieces and wrenching the pieces out individually. In the process, he had crushed an important nerve at the side of Quast's chin.

Gravity is trying to pull my face into the ground, Quast said to himself, and me after it. Then he told himself he was starting to look like Somerset Maugham.

But not writing like him.

Fiction writing was the latest of Quast's many careers, and by far his least successful. He had been at times a jazz clarinetist, a producer of TV commercials, a band leader, a gigolo, a kidnapper, a newsstand operator, an airplane pilot, a hotel clerk, and a stand-up comic in several dismal nightclubs.

Quast remembered the good years when his clarinet-playing brought him all kinds of money and led to fronting a small combo that worked regularly in and around Montreal. The Lidos. He drank as much as he wanted in those days, starting early in the afternoon with beer and changing to small glasses of neat whisky as the evening wore on.

There was no doubt the booze was partly to blame when he began knocking Beverly around. Probably she should have left him sooner than she did. It was the children who suffered the most in that situation. Donnie and Marlene—how old were they now? Christ, he couldn't forget a thing like his own kids' ages. Eleven and 9? No. Donnie had been 11 when he drove up for his birthday last time, and Quast had missed one since. So 13 and 11—that must be it.

Quast hadn't intended to start thinking of his children at this hour of the morning, alone and barefooted on a cold tile floor. He began to tremble. Then, unexpectedly, he opened his mouth and out came a shrill gasp of terror.

He watched the tears rush down his cheeks past both sides of his mouth. His stiffened legs began to vibrate so that he was clinging to the rim of the sink when Vera appeared in the doorway.

"What's wrong?"

"I feel—I feel . . ."

"What?"

"Mmmmmmm . . ." He could not tell her what he was feeling.

"Come back to bed. Come on. Here, put your arm around my shoulder. Good God, you're freezing."

Covered up in bed with the shaded lamp burning and beyond it pale dawn showing around the edge of the venetian blind, Quast was able to talk.

"I had this terrible idea when I was standing there."

"What was it?"

"I can't remember." This was not true. The idea was still in his mind, but suppressed to a secretive level.

"Something about yourself? About me?"

"It wasn't about you. I couldn't think anything terrible about you." He turned his head and looked at her worried face. Vera's tan was fading too, faster than his own. Her hair looked ratty with the blonde growing out and the dark roots nearly an inch long.

"You should get your hair done," he said.

"Who has the money?"

A year ago, before they invented the kidnapping during which young Lester decided to die on them, they had a reasonable amount of money. But it had been frustrating to know that the old man back in New York was sitting on a pile big enough to feed them forever if only he would loosen up on Vera's allowance or die and leave her and Lester the lot. But it was not in the cards. Castle Logan was alive while Quast and Vera were hiding from a 99-year sentence.

He said, "Would your father forgive you for jumping bail? If you called him?"

"Never. All I'll get if I phone New York is a tracer on the call and a carful of cops shortly thereafter."

"You'd better call him anyway."

"Why?"

"I don't know."

She watched him for a full minute. Then she said, "How many capsules are you taking now?"

"Three before bed."

"I'm giving you three more now."

He swallowed the bright blue-and-red capsules with water and sank back onto the pillow, feeling cold and thin.

"Want to go back to sleep? Or I'll talk if you want."

The room was bright enough now so that it made little difference when she snapped off the bedside lamp. He said,

"I don't think I can sleep."

"All right." She went through her active business of sitting up, pounding the pillows, and arranging the blanket around both of them. When they were neatly covered she said, "I don't want you worrying about money."

"That isn't what I'm worried about."

"What then?"

"Immortality." The word came out with no conscious thought on Quast's part.

"Aren't we all?" Vera said, thinking of ways to get some money so Norman would stop worrying. Her job barely paid enough to keep them in this rotten set of rooms. It would solve a lot if he could find work, but everything he could do well was public. If somebody recognized him, they were finished.

"I mean I'm really worried about being forgotten. When I'm dead."

"That's so far off."

"No, it isn't. I'm almost 45. And I can remember thirty years ago like it was yesterday. Pretty soon another thirty will go by and I'll be long gone."

"I'm sitting here worrying about how to pay the rent next week and you're troubled about thirty years from now." She said this gently.

"I realize now that everything I've done has been in an effort to be remembered after I die. All the years standing up in nightclubs and taking gaff every night from drunks was me trying to become Jackie Gleason or somebody. And where did it get me? Nobody will ever remember Norman Quast."

"Who'll remember Gleason?"

"He's in films and TV tapes. I bet he gets talked about somewhere every day. A hundred years from now they'll do programs about comedy and Gleason will get mentioned."

"A hundred years is no big deal."

"The reason I broke my back hustling the jazz band was to get some records made that would last. We cut two and they both died."

"You're a good clarinet player, Norman, and you know it when you aren't feeling down."

"I'm good in my class. But there are classes above me I can never reach. De Franco, Giuffrè—I gave it everything I've got but I can't do it the way they do."

"You'll kill yourself if you keep trying to be as good as everybody who's better than you." She sought an example. "Hemingway was famous. But he wasn't Tolstoi."

"Hemingway blew out the back of his head with a rifle," Quast said. "And nobody's forgetting that."

Vera felt cold. She got out of bed and closed the window. "There's some bread in the kitchen. I'll make us toast and coffee. O.K.?"

"Half the reason for kidnapping your brother was so I'd be in the papers and on television."

"You were. We both were."

"I didn't mean him to die, Vera. He just went under with all the stuff we were feeding him to keep him asleep."

Vera walked out of the bedroom, her face stiff. She hated it when they talked about Lester. She was not unhappy when her brother OD'd but that was the end of it. Quast had better stop bringing it up or she would end his troubles for him herself.

In the tiny windowless kitchen, she turned on the light and surprised a dozen cockroaches. They scattered for cover, dark shapes scurrying across the rusty porcelain of the sink and the warped drainboard. Feeling sick, she closed her eyes and waited for them to disappear.

She put bread in the toaster and turned on the gas under the orange kettle that always reminded her of a pumpkin with a handle. She moved Quast's portable typewriter to one end of the table to make room for buttering the toast. There was a sheet of paper in it but she didn't look at the words typed on it. He was writing such awful stuff these days, it scared her. No wonder he couldn't sell it.

When she carried the tray into the bedroom, Quast was standing by the window looking out. He was wearing his old maroon bathrobe and he had raised the venetian blind halfway.

"Good, you're up," she said. "Let's eat and we'll both feel better."

But when he sat on the edge of the bed and ate toast with his eyes glassy and expressionless, she knew he was in a bad way. Desperately, she reached for something to say.

"Hey. Maybe we'll get some mail this morning. You're due to hear from the magazine." She watched him for a reaction. "Wouldn't it be wild if they bought another of your stories?"

Quast intoned, "They've rejected four since they bought the first one. And even that was published over the pseudonym. The name Norman Quast can never appear in print. If it does, they'll come for me."

Vera snapped at the toast, crumbs scattering over her bare legs. "You don't *want* to feel better. I give up."

She took the tray away and, without returning to the bedroom, went from the kitchen to the bathroom where she showered until the meager supply of hot water was used up. As she dried herself, feeling better, she resolved to bend even further to assist Norman. She knew perfectly well he could not help his mood. It was wrong of her to turn on him. It was like getting mad at a man with a broken leg because he won't get up and run.

Back in the bedroom, Quast took her by surprise because he was dressed. He had not gotten beyond his robe for days. But here he was in his blue blazer suit with a white shirt and striped tie. He had even buffed his black shoes, which gleamed below the wide trouser cuffs. The incongruous aspect of his appearance was his unshaven face, which was stubbly, pale, and damp.

Panic rose in her as she asked him, "Where are you going?"

"I remembered my idea."

"What idea?"

"The one I told you about that I thought of this morning."

"You never told me what it was."

Quast stepped close to her and embraced her. Now his arms felt strong, the way they used to feel when she first met him aboard the ship and they danced every night on their way across the Atlantic. He kissed her and his whiskers rubbed her chin and made it sting.

"You'll hear about it," he said.

She heard the front door open and close. When she went back to the bedroom, she looked and found the dark smudges on the end of the bedspread where he had buffed his shoes. She looked further and found the note. It was tucked behind the typewriter roller, replacing the sheet of half-typed manuscript which lay crumpled on the floor. Trembling with a curious excitement, Vera removed the note, unfolded it, and read the words printed in red felt pen: Remember Quast.

Two days later, when it was over and she had calmed down, she telephoned the police. She gave them the note as she gave herself up—without comment. None was needed. Quast's brief note was anti-climactic indeed following his spectacular exit which dominated the front pages of many newspapers and led off most TV newscasts on the day it took place.

It was unique material. A man wanted for murder travels from up-state New York to Montreal on a Greyhound bus. Unrecognized, he takes a taxi to his former home, where he kidnaps his wife and two children. Had he shot them and then turned the gun on himself, that would have been shocking, but not original. Quast did much better.

Roping them together, he herded his family through an inside passage to the garage and into their station wagon. Then he drove to Cartierville Airport. Here, again displaying the gun and threatening violence, he was able to bluff his way to the tarmac, where he stole a four-seater Comanche and loaded Beverly, Donnie, and Marlene aboard.

The tower allowed him to take off. He was obviously a deranged man and they humored him, they went along. But then Quast reached into the hat and pulled out his bid for immortality. Circling the field and gaining altitude with each circuit, he levelled off at two thousand feet. Then he put the nose down in a vertical power-drive and flew at 250 miles an hour into the center of the main runway.

There was no question this time of Vera Logan being released on bail. Even Castle Logan's millions could not arrange her freedom. The old man had to go and see his daughter in the prison visiting room. He sat with his legs spread, the old-fashioned boots he wore planted flat on the floor, his hands splayed, his fingers pressing down against the

scarred surface of the plastic counter. He was braced at all points of contact with his world, which seemed to him to be spinning at a crazy angle. His daughter's face behind the glass screen was lopsided and the saddest face he had ever seen.

"You've done it all now," Logan said, "the two of you. Last year you murdered your brother. Then you ran out on \$50,000 bail I put up for you. Now here you are behind bars for the rest of your life."

Vera was not picking up much of what people said to her. But she heard the reference to "your brother." It almost made her smile. Only on occasions when there was trouble was Lester referred to as her brother. The rest of the time Castle Logan spoke of him as "my son."

"What really burns me," the old man went on, "is the way the media are turning that rotten sonofabitch into some kind of a celebrity. I spent my life in the music business, made a fortune at it, and the most I ever got was mentions in the society columns and that little article in *Variety* when I retired. Are you listening to me?"

Vera raised her eyes. She recognized the signs of rage in Logan's face. She had thought Norman's event a total waste, but it wasn't so—it was taking weeks, if not years, off her father's life. She looked away, caught the matron's attention, arose, and stood loosely, like a marionette, waiting to be taken away. Castle Logan raised his voice.

"*Newsweek* has done a feature article on him and *Time* made him their cover story. The crazy bastard's picture is on the cover. They've started writing about psychopaths as if they're some wonderful new breed. Quast!" Logan expelled the name in a spray of saliva as if it was a living insect that had flown into his mouth. "Quast! He's a big man now. They're putting him in the textbooks!"

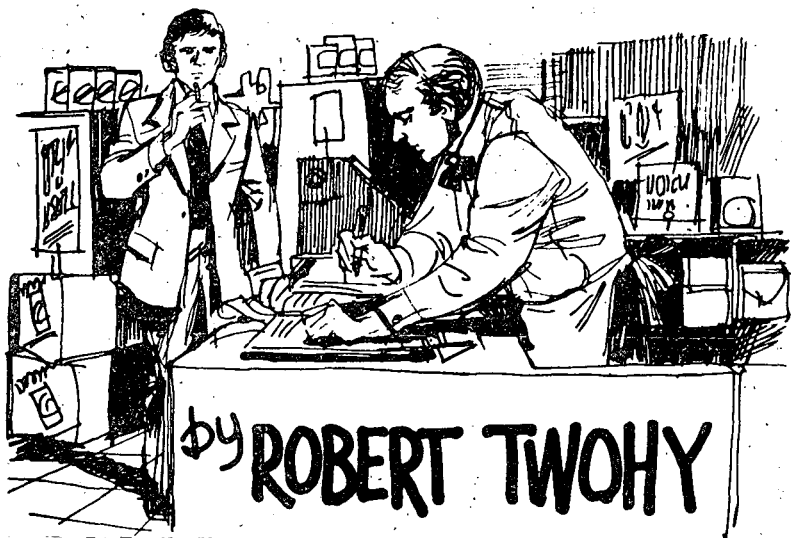
The door leading from the visiting room on the prisoners' side closed behind his daughter and the matron, leaving Castle Logan alone with the uniformed guard on the public side. Continuing his helpless tirade, he said to the guard, "That can't be right, can it? You work all your life and stay honest and you're nobody. This moron commits his atrocity and goes down in history. Is that the way it should be?"

The guard let Logan out. He considered the old man's question to be serious so he thought a moment before he said, "I don't know about you, but I've never considered myself to be nobody."

It was the right answer. But the frightened lonely millionaire shuffled away, too old and too angry to hear it.

They're called hitmen, pistoleers, cowboys, and many other things, but whatever they're called it's gangbusters when they meet their mark . . .

THE PISTOLEER



by **ROBERT TWOHY**

Arnie Coyle stopped in at Harry's Place.

Liverlips, the bartender, said, "Your cousin wants to see you, Arnie."

"Oh? Fix me a double, Liverlips. Have a shot yourself."

Arnie drank his drink. He said to Liverlips, "That's good news." It meant Hogface had a job for him. Arnie could use the bread. He'd been blowing a lot lately.

He had a new girl, Donna Delight. That was how they billed her at the topless joint. He didn't know her real name. What was the difference? Arnie called her Featherbrain. He had a nickname for everybody. He didn't bother with real names. What was a name, anyway? Nicknames were better—you could remember people by nicknames.

For a stripper in a joint, Featherbrain could sure get rid of the bread. Arnie was near tapped. But if Hogface had a job for him, he'd soon be loaded again. Chicago was a great town when you had the bread. Lousy when you didn't.

He had another drink, then bought a cab with three of his last remaining dollars, and tipped with a fourth. One thing they'd never put on his headstone: Here Lies a Piker.

His cousin Hogface lived in a plush apartment near the lake, in The Caribbean, on the 21st floor. Hogface's Japanese butler opened the door.

Hogface sat in a big armchair—a fat man with a wide flat nose, mostly nostrils, and a morose droop to his mouth. He looked as if his feet, teeth, and back hurt all at the same time.

"Hi, Hogface," Arnie said.

The pained look on his cousin's face got more so. "I've told you not to call me that!"

"Yeah, that's right. Force of habit. Remember how when we were kids, Hog—Les—remember how I started calling you that and all the guys took it up?"

"We're not kids any more. And I've told you not to call me that. I've got a big position now. A lot of important people know me." There was a dark frown on his fat red face. Arnie was a little alarmed. He hadn't meant to get him sore. "I've told you and told you. You said you'd stop it. But you don't stop it."

"I'll stop it, Les."

"I'm sick of it. I'm fed up with it. You don't know how much I'm fed up with it."

"I won't call you that any more," Arnie promised.

"You keep saying that."

"I keep forgetting."

"You're too damn forgetful. I'm sick of your forgetfulness."

Arnie nodded. He sat quietly and tried to look cooperative. It was

hard to take Hogface seriously. Arnie couldn't help thinking of him as the fat bug-eyed kid he had been in school. Now he was a big shot. It had taken place during the six years Arnie had spent in jail, after his conviction for armed robbery. He still couldn't figure how Hogface had moved up the ladder, how he rated an apartment at The Caribbean. It was a screwy world.

After a few seconds Hogface said, "There's a guy named Haines, runs a little grocery in a two-bit town near Frisco called Linfield. Dave's Quality Market, on Water Street."

Arnie repeated the names and places.

"It's an insurance case. He's a hick, but he's supposed to carry a lot of insurance."

That was usually the case. Insurance. People were worth more to their relatives dead than alive.

Hogface said, "You're supposed to hit him in the store. It's supposed to look like a robbery."

"I got it."

"They say middle of the afternoon is the best time. The store's supposed to be usually empty then."

Arnie didn't have to write anything down. Details of a job stayed in his mind, like the details were written down on a roll of tape that he could crank back and study at will. When it came to work he was all concentration. He was a pistoleer, and serious about it.

"What's this guy look like?"

"About 45, big, heavy eyebrows, bald on top. You don't need to worry about getting the wrong man. He don't employ any clerks in the store."

Arnie didn't ask who was paying for the job. Probably the wife, if there was one. It didn't matter to him. It was a job, that was all. Somebody would pay Hogface and Hogface would pay him.

The way it went, somebody would want somebody else dead and ask around. Hogface was in the business, and like as not word would get to him. He had a reputation around the country and a lot of guys could make a buck by steering a job to him. He had other businesses too, of course—professional execution had started as a sideline, a way to use talent when nothing special was in the hopper in his regular rackets—but it had mushroomed. He had three specialists now. But Arnie was the best, and the busiest; he had carried out eleven contracts. This one

would make an even dozen.

Arnie wondered what his grand total would be when it came time to hang it up. Probably in the neighborhood of fifty. He had been a pistoleer less than two years, since getting out. He was now thirty-three. Ten more years anyway—that should bring him up in the neighborhood of fifty.

Hogface took out his wallet. He started pulling out twenties.

"This is expense money. Go to a town called Chandler. It's eighty miles from Frisco, and about an hour's drive from Linfield. I've made a reservation for you at the Capitol Hotel in Chandler under the name of Brown. Here's your license."

He took from his wallet a driver's license issued by the State of California in the name of Herbert H. Brown.

Arnie took it from him and looked it over. The age, the height, the blue eyes, the brown hair, were right on; the color photo made Brown a twin. Hogface had a guy in his set-up who specialized in licenses; how he doctored them, whether he worked from real licenses or started from nothing, Arnie didn't know. He only knew the guy was an artist, and he'd never been given a license to use that wasn't a perfect match on all the factors that counted.

Hogface said, "Leave tomorrow morning. There's no deadline for this, but the sooner the better."

Arnie put the license and the stack of twenties in his wallet. "No sweat."

"O.K. When you get back there will be seven grand for you."

Arnie nodded. He was pleased. Ten seconds of violence followed by weeks of well paid leisure. He was in the right profession all right.

When he got back, he and Featherbrain would go through that seven grand like sand through a tin horn.

He spent the night at Featherbrain's, telling her only that he had to go out of town for a few days. The less she knew about his business, the better.

He left her some bucks, then cabbled out to O'Hare. His reservation, which he had made by phone after leaving Hogface, was for United's 2:40 flight.

He got his ticket and was walking toward the United terminal when the detective stopped him.

Arnie knew the detective but he couldn't be bothered remembering his name. Arnie had his own nickname for him: Zippermouth. For his tight thin mouth.

Zippermouth said, "Leaving us, Arnie?"

"That's right. I'm taking a little vacation."

"Let's see if you're packing a gun."

"How the hell could I get a-gun past the detector?"

Arnie was motioned off to the side by Zippermouth. He put his bag on a bench and Zippermouth went through it. He then gave Arnie a quick competent frisk. Arnie said, "Don't you ever get discouraged?"

"One day I'll catch you with a gun. I'll nail you one day."

"You can dream about it. It won't happen."

"I've got some ideas about what you do on these little vacation trips of yours. What Hinkle hires you to do."

"Ideas aren't evidence."

"One of these days, Arnie."

Arnie grinned as Zippermouth, after staring at him with his cold policeman's eyes, turned and walked away.

He relaxed on the plane. He wasn't worried whether any of Zippermouth's sidekicks were aboard traveling with him to the coast. It didn't matter if they were. He could always spot a tail and he knew how to shake one. Zippermouth had tried it a few times in the past but it had never gotten him anywhere. Arnie was long gone from the tail by the time the job took place.

In San Francisco he checked into a hotel on Powell Street and spent the night grooving on the North Beach scene. The next day he checked out. He was positive he didn't have a tail. Still, he switched from one cab to another, four in all, and wound up at the bus depot in Oakland. If anyone had started out following him, anyone was sitting down someplace now, his-head-spinning. Arnie was too hip to be followed. He could lose himself in an empty parking lot.

The Capitol Hotel in Chandler was near the train depot—not the best hotel Arnie had ever been in, but decent enough. He said to the clerk, "Herbert Brown, from Los Angeles."

"Yes, sir." The clerk checked the reservation sheet, then gave Arnie the key. Also a package from under the desk. "This arrived last night."

Arnie took the package, the size of a shoebox, tied with heavy cord.

He went up to his room and put the package in a desk drawer unopened. That was his way. Small-town hotels have maids who can be snoopy.

Arnie didn't have to open the box to know what Hogface had sent him. It was standard procedure. Always when Arnie arrived at a hotel, on his way to a killing, there was a package the size of a shoebox waiting for him.

He wouldn't open the box until it was time to go to work. That was the thing—to have the gun in his possession as short a time as possible. That was how he was able to stroll past cops like Zippermouth without a care in the world.

After the job, he would wrap the pistol and the loaded clip—lighter now by at least one bullet—back in the cotton they had come in and return them to the box. He would reverse the wrapping paper and write another name and address on it—the name and address of a man in a city in Florida. That man, Arnie knew, would take the wrapping paper and the heavy carton and burn them. Then he would take off in a small power boat and when he got out aways he would drop the gun and the clip into the sea.

And then there would be nothing anyone could ever find that could link Arnie or his cousin Hogface to an obscure murder in an obscure California town.

The day after he arrived in Chandler was Friday. He felt good. Friday was always his lucky day.

He had a good crab salad in the hotel dining room. He always had salad for lunch on days like this. You didn't wind up logy.

He went back to his room, got the still unopened package, and sauntered down the hot main street to a car rental agency where he got a car, giving his deposit in cash and showing the false license to prove he was who he said he was—Herbert H. Brown.

He drove the snappy blue Chevy sedan about an hour, bypassing two or three little towns, and at length reached the town of Linfield, a jerkwater town ten miles off the highway, in farm country. It had old-fashioned frame houses and wide streets bordered with shade trees. One of the streets was Water Street. He drove down it and after a half-dozen blocks he saw a sign on a corner building—DAVE'S QUALITY MARKET.

Arnie drove past it and around the block, parking under some trees, the car pointing back toward the highway. With his pocket knife, he cut the cords on the package and stripped back the wrapping paper. He took the cover off the box and reached both hands into it, spreading the tightly packed cotton and uncovering the object wrapped in a dustcloth. He looked around. No one was in sight. He flipped open the dustcloth and lifted out the gun, a .38, and a loaded clip—he could tell by the weight it was a full load. He shoved the clip into place and slipped the gun into his jacket pocket, then got out of the car and walked up the block toward Dave's.

It was Hicksville, all right. The only living thing he saw on the way to the market was a big brown dog, dead asleep in the middle of a driveway.

The screen door of Dave's was hooked open. Arnie glanced in. A few feet inside the doorway was a three-sided counter with an old register on it. Behind the counter, frowning over some accounts, was a flabby-looking guy with thick black eyebrows and a bullet head gone bald on top.

Arnie paused to light a cigarette. It gave him time for a last casual glance up and down the empty street before he stepped into the store.

Haines glanced up as he came in. Arnie walked past the counter to the rear of the store, which was dark and cluttered, with narrow aisles. He wanted to be sure his victim was alone. He sauntered around as if he was looking for something, peering down the aisles. There was nobody else in the store.

He looked over at Haines. The grocer was back at his accounts, his head lowered. An aging yuck, Arnie said to himself, and a nickname came into his head: The Dumb Bowler. Dumb for the general look of the yuck, bowler for the cheap-looking gilt trophy cup that occupied space on a back shelf.

Arnie went up to the counter, on the side that gave him a view of the door and the street outside. Haines looked up from his books and stared at the eye of Arnie's gun.

Arnie said, "Empty the register."

The guy stood motionless, staring at the gun. Really a yuck.

"It's a gun," said Arnie. "Like you see on TV. I squeeze the trigger, you wind up with a hole in your belly. Empty the register."

Haines started to take bills from the register. He put a little heap of

them on the counter, mostly ones.

Arnie said, "That's it?" Haines nodded. Arnie took a step back, leveling the gun at the grocer's heart. He said in a soft voice, "O.K., Dumb Bowler. Now you're off to dreamland."

Enjoying the look on Haines's face, he put gentle pressure on the trigger. Then Haines's right hand and arm shot under the counter, a blur like a snake striking, and the hand shot back into view with a gun in it, like a bouquet in the hand of a magician. Arnie didn't even have time to be stunned. He was still squeezing the trigger when a bullet slammed into his chest.

Sergeant Otis Ledger of the Linfield Police looked down at the body on the floor of Dave's Quality Market. He said, "What are you, working for Casey the Mortician on the side?"

"Let's not be funny." Haines looked damp and unhappy. He wiped his face with his counter rag, leaving grey streaks. "It's nothing to be funny about."

"Who's being funny? I'm awed. You've gunned down more people in this grocery in the past month than I've bagged in twenty years on the force."

"This is the second."

"Yeah. Tell me, Dave—can shooting down customers become habit-forming?"

"Leave off the clowning, Otis. I'm not in the mood."

Ledger gazed at the man on the floor. "You know, I think this guy is still bubbling. The ambulance should be here in a couple of minutes."

"He won't live. You can tell by his face. That waxy look. That's death on the way."

"You're the man should know."

"Leave off, Otis."

Taking a piece of paper from the counter, Ledger stooped and picked up the .38, which lay near the dying man's hand. He laid it on the counter. Haines said, "Why'd you do that?" He meant, why use the paper?

"I saw Kojak do it on TV. If Kojak says it's the thing to do, I'll do it. He's my ideal."

His lips untwisted as he looked down at the man. "He didn't get off a shot, Dave?"

"If he had, you wouldn't be talking to me. It's the damndest thing. He was squeezing the trigger when I made my move. I should be dead. Even if it was the fastest draw I ever made."

"Well, you're the fastest draw in the county. You've got the cup there on the shelf to prove it."

Haines said, "It's different shooting balloons against a timeclock than shooting down a man. He could have taken the goddamn money. I wasn't going to draw on him. Not till he told me he was going to shoot me." He shook his head. "I feel lousy about it, but I'd do it again. You have to."

"That's what you said last time. It caused quite a splash in the papers, all the way to the city. Quick-draw artist shoots for real. This'll make you even more famous."

"I don't want to be famous, Ledger. I just want these creeps to leave me alone."

Ledger gazed again at the man on the floor. "The other one was a bum, all coked up. This one looks like a pro. Sharp clothes, sharp-looking face—like a big-city pro. What the hell was he doing here? Why should he want to knock off a neighborhood store in Linfield?"

"You got me. Thirty-two dollars in the till. His shoes cost more than that."

"Know anyone that'd want you dead?"

"No. I've got no wife, no insurance."

"Maybe he'll talk before he dies."

They went to the door. The ambulance siren had come into hearing.

Detective Ira Sheehan, who had a tight thin mouth, rode the elevator up 21 floors of the Caribbean Apartments. Two other detectives, with mouths almost as tight, rode with him. It was 4:00 in the afternoon.

The butler, Takaguchi, opened the door to their ring. They pushed past him and stood in a semicircle in front of Les Hinkle, who had been known to his late cousin, Arnie Coyle, as Hogface.

Hinkle sat in his armchair. His habitual pained look got several degrees more so as he stared at the faces of the detectives.

He said uncertainly, "What's going on?"

"Didn't you hear?"

"Hear what?"

Ira Sheehan said, "Your cousin ate a bullet yesterday. A quick-draw artist out west gunned him down."

"Really?"

"Yeah, really."

"That's too bad. Arnie wasn't a bad guy."

"Arnie was a psychopathic monstrosity. Like you. The question is, why'd you do it? Why'd you send him up against that sharpshooter with a clip loaded with dummy bullets?"

"What are you talking about?" Hinkle's face tried to register indignation and puzzlement. "What's a dummy bullet?"

"A hunk of lead with no gunpowder. We got that word from the Coast. Why'd you do it?"

"What have I got to do with it?"

"Arnie lived long enough to sing. He told how you set him up. He sang an opera. We've got names, dates, and M.O.s concerning eleven killings he did for you. And a lot more about what goes on in your murder factory. We've checked some of it, and it checks. It's evidence. That was a deathbed statement that Arnie made. You're in the soup up to your fat neck, Les. I've got a warrant." He pulled it from his pocket. Hinkle's bulging eyes stared at it. "After I warn you that anything you say may be used against you, you might as well start talking."

Hinkle sat in his plush armchair, breathing through his wide nostrils, a sticky soupy sound. His fried-egg eyes were glassy and strange.

Sheehan felt excitement. What he had been waiting for a long time seemed to be happening. Hinkle was a psycho. He looked ready to flip out. His destruct button had been pushed.

Hinkle said, in a hoarse voice, "I was sick of him. All my life I been sick of him. Good pistoleers I could train—and they'd treat me with respect. But that creep never showed me respect." He looked away from the detectives. His eyes were brooding. "I hated him since grade school. He thought he was something special. He got the girls, the friends. I didn't have nothing. He called me Hogface. I took him on after he got out, not because I liked him but because I knew he was good: I could use him. And I got family feelings, he was family. So I took him on. I thought things would change. But he kept calling me Hogface."

Sheehan murmured, "You poor kid." His thin lips were twisted.

Hinkle didn't hear. "I'd had enough of him. Three weeks ago I read

about that quick-draw cowboy. I read odd bits, it's a hobby of mine, and good business—I go to the library and read papers from all the big cities. Anyhow, I read about the cowboy in the Frisco paper and it hit me right away. I thought, this is the guy that can knock off Arnie."

Callahan, one of the other detectives, said, "Why not just get one of your regular guns to knock off Arnie?"

"'Cause I don't do things that way. This was a personal thing. You start putting your guys to shooting each other for personal reasons, you're going to split up your group. You're going to lose control."

"So you sent Arnie to a shootout with a clipload of dummies."

"He had it-coming. I'm somebody in this town. I ain't Hogface any more. I got a position. Important people know me. I'm Mister Hinkle." He turned his glazed frog-eyes to Sheehan. "He should of listened. I told him. I told him ten dozen times. He should of stopped calling me Hogface."

"I kind of agree." Sheehan turned to one of the detectives. "Mr. Taylor, will you see if you can locate Mr. Hinkle's coat and hat?"

"Certainly, Mr. Sheehan."

"Mr. Hinkle, will you be so kind as to accompany us downtown? The district attorney has heard a lot about your activities and would like very much to discuss them with you."

Hinkle lifted himself from the armchair. The glazed look in his eyes suddenly changed. He seemed to Sheehan to be back from his trip-out.

"Stop ribbing me," he whined. "You're just pretending to respect me."

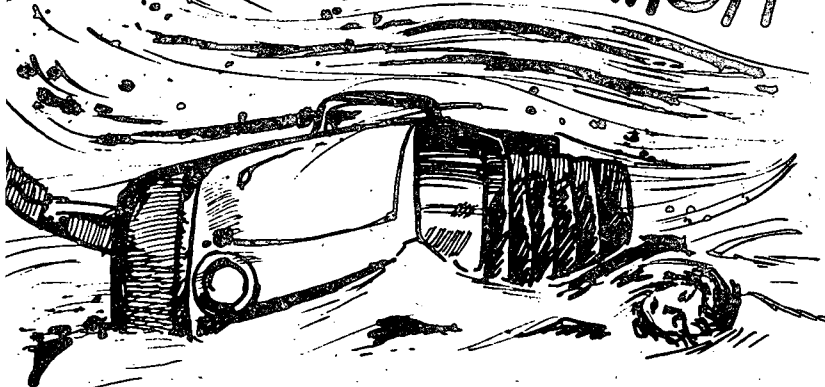
"All right," said Sheehan. "We won't call you Mr. Hinkle any more, I promise."

"Here's your hat and coat, Hogface," said Detective Taylor.



Whatever the statistics show, it's still true that crime knows no season . . .

THE TRANSPARENCY



by **STEPHEN WASYLYK**

Pushed almost horizontally by a northeast wind with an edge as biting as a stainless-steel blade, the snow began falling at midday and by four o'clock the road crews were out performing their slow-moving, roaring, planking ballet.

At the sheriff's small office, I had swivelled my chair around to stare out of the window at the storm, waiting for Foster to check over my entries in the daily log so that I could close out my shift. I watched the

snow pile up and hoped it would pass over as predicted and that none of the hundred and one emergencies that *could* happen *did* happen. wanted to settle in for a quiet evening.

When the phone rang, I reached behind me without looking and lifted it to my ear. "Fox River sheriff's office, Deputy Gates speaking, I said:

"This is Danner Haddon," said a deep voice. "Is Foster there?"

"I'll see," I said.

I held my hand over the mouthpiece and spun the chair.

Foster was scanning one of my reports, the thinness of his face accentuated by the desk light.

I cleared my throat, he looked up, and I said quietly, "It's Danner Haddon, but if you don't want to talk to him it's all right. I didn't tell him you were here."

His voice seemed ten degrees colder than the outside temperature. "Who appointed you my guardian?" He reached for the phone on his desk.

I waited until he spoke, then dropped the receiver into the cradle. There may have been a few people in town who didn't know Danner Haddon had taken Rona Steele away from Foster a year ago but wasn't one of them. Foster and I had been friends for a long time. We had fought in Vietnam together and afterward he had persuaded me to take the deputy's job when he had been elected sheriff.

I turned back to the window and tuned out Foster's side of the conversation. If it was business, he would tell me.

The outside door swung open and then the inner one, letting in a small draft of cold air and a large man in a heavy storm coat, the fur-lined earflaps of his trooper's hat turned down, the round heavy deputy's badge gleaming brightly on the upturned center flap. His teeth showed white below his full black mustache.

"You're five minutes late, Julio," I said. "An ordinary citizen is allowed to be delayed by a little snow, but not my relief man."

He slid out of the coat. "It's getting hairy out there. Another hour and nothing will be moving." He chuckled. "Nothing like this in Puerto Rico."

I heard Foster's phone hit the cradle and spun the chair again.

Foster's face seldom indicated his thoughts or emotions and it showed nothing as he stood up and reached for his coat. "You'd better

come along. Rona went out at eight this morning to take pictures. She isn't back yet."

I pulled my boots toward me. "Does Danner know where she went?"

"The valley."

"It'll be dark in less than an hour," I said.

"I know. Damned fool Haddon tried to find her himself before calling. We'll go to the house, leave from there, and make a quick trip to a blind I helped her build a few years ago. She should be somewhere along the way. If we don't find her . . ."

He didn't have to spell it out. If we didn't find her, she would be out there until morning. The temperature was touching zero, the wind-chill factor was well below that, and the falling snow limited visibility. We couldn't ask men to go out at night under those conditions even if we could get a competent group together with most of the secondary roads already closed.

The house was ten miles out of town—long and low, of meticulously fitted fieldstone, reached by a narrow two-lane private road. It had been built by Rona's great-grandfather, a man who admired money so much he had devoted his life not only to acquiring a great deal of it but to holding onto it. Since subsequent Steeles were equally parsimonious, most of the money had filtered down to the last remaining members of the family—Rona and her older brother Dylan.

The fact that she was wealthy had never affected Rona one way or the other, except that it had allowed her to do what she wanted to do. As a young girl, she had discovered two things—she loved birds and animals and she had a flair for photographing them. And since her moneyed ancestor had willed the family a great many acres in the valley that included heavily wooded hills and a lake and a stream, she had inherited a private preserve in which to practice. The result was several excellent books that established her reputation as a naturalist and wildlife photographer.

Four-wheeled drive and heavy snow tires got us to the house over roads so bad it was questionable if we could get back to town before morning unless the storm tapered off.

Danner Haddon was a slight man with a receding hairline and a full brown beard. He was almost fifteen years older than Rona and a not-

very-successful novelist she had met on a trip to her New York publisher and had married after knowing him for two weeks.

It was easy to see why Rona had fallen in love with him. Contrasted with Foster, he was sophisticated, charming, and articulate, and he treated Rona with a gracious deference any woman would love.

His face pink from being punished by the cold wind, his eyes worried, he stood before the fireplace in light slacks and a turtleneck pull-over that were fine for an overheated apartment but not for Fox River in winter. He seemed half the size of Foster, who loomed before him in his bulky coat and heavy boots.

"I'd like to go along," Haddon said.

"You tried once," said Foster shortly. "Are you certain she went to the blind near the lake?"

"That's what she said—she thought she'd seen a snow bunting there."

"What's a snow bunting?" I asked.

"A bird," said Haddon. "They belong in Canada and only come this far south during a severe winter. She hoped to get a few photos."

"Did she walk or take her snowmobile?"

"The snowmobile—even though she's always said it takes an hour for the birds to settle down after it passes."

"Damn," said Foster. "I was hoping we could use it."

"We have two," said Haddon. "Rona bought one for me so I could go along with her occasionally. She wanted me to go this morning but . . ."

He spread his hands. "I used it when I went looking for her, but I'm not good at handling it and I couldn't see where I was going."

"Get the snowshoes and the packs," said Foster to me.

I met them at the rear of the house where Haddon had parked the snowmobile under a small lean-to. Foster finished filling the tank, we strapped on the small survival packs, and I held the snowshoes under my arm, slipped in behind Foster, and we moved out.

The first part of the going wasn't bad. Trees broke the force of the wind, but it was very cold and the beam of the big headlight had trouble poking its way through the heavy swirling snow.

We came out onto a meadow along the bank of a small stream where the full force of the wind hit us head-on and hard. The engine of the

snowmobile labored. The last thing we needed was for the soft snow and our weight to stall it out. I nudged Foster's shoulder and yelled in his ear: "I'd better walk!"

We stopped. I strapped on the snowshoes and we took off again, the snowmobile moving more easily without my two hundred pounds, Foster keeping it slow enough so that I could stay alongside.

That was how we found her. Foster steered the snowmobile away from me down a steep bank to the frozen flatness of the creek, and when the heavy machine slid away from me and turned downstream I angled to cut him off and sensed a dark mass off to my right that seemed out of place.

I cupped my hands around my mouth and yelled to Foster. For a moment I thought he hadn't heard me above the wind and the roar of the engine but then the headlight of the snowmobile swung as he circled back and the beam stabbed through the falling snow and picked up the bright red metal of the overturned snowmobile projecting from a drift.

Half covered by the heavy snow, she lay pinned beneath the machine and it was obvious she was dead. I stood listening to the oboelike sighing of the wind, the cold numbing my face, watching Foster. He acted no differently than if she had been someone he didn't know at all.

There was no time then to wonder how it had happened. Since hers wasn't the first body Foster and I had to bring in from a place no ambulance could go, it didn't take long to rig a travois of saplings and the blankets from our packs and attach it to Foster's snowmobile. He started back slowly while I followed on foot, hunched deep in my heavy coat. What Foster was thinking I couldn't know.

The storm let up about midnight and two hours later the ambulance got through to the Haddon house. Haddon and Foster went with it. I remained behind to answer the questions that would come at daylight and helped myself to a glass of bourbon, tossed a log on the fire, and stretched out on the sofa, too tired to think about much of anything at all.

A hand shook me awake and I opened my eyes to see the plump face of Mrs. Lithone, the Haddons' grey-haired housekeeper.

I swung to a sitting position. "What time is it?"

"Seven," she said. "What are you *doing* here? Where are the Mister and Miss Rona?"

I pulled her to the sofa beside me and put my arm around her.

"Are you getting fresh with me, Mr. Gates?" she asked.

"No," I said. "I just wanted you sitting when I told you Miss Rona is dead."

She closed her eyes.

"It was the storm," I said. "She went out yesterday morning and had an accident on the way back."

Mrs. Lithone had enough years behind her to have seen her share of death and come to accept it. She sighed, her eyes wet. "Where is Mr. Haddon?"

"He went into town with her."

"Poor man. He'll feel terrible even though it solves his problem."

"What problem?"

"It wasn't her! He loved her."

"I'm sure he did."

"It was just that he couldn't stand Fox River. He wanted to go back to New York, but he knew she wouldn't go with him and if she did she would be just as unhappy there as he was here. He intended to leave but he didn't know how to tell her without hurting her." She sighed again. "Maybe it's best this way. She'll never know. His going would have been very hard on her."

"What's it like outside?" I asked.

"Clear and cold. The road crew did a wonderful job. I had no trouble at all."

"Good," I said. "I have business to attend to. Is there any coffee left?"

She made a face. "From last night? I'll brew a fresh pot. You get cleaned up and I'll make you a good breakfast." Her eyes became wet again.

It took a little time to find the place again but I had the snowmobile. The snow had packed down a little and cruising the bank of the creek presented no problem.

In daylight, the picture was clear. For most of the way, the meadow sloped only two or three feet to the creek. At some places, however, the slope had been eroded away into an abrupt drop, which in itself

didn't present much of a hazard. But the meadow wasn't flat. There were areas where the ground rose and the drop became as much as six feet. Rona had evidently lost her way in the storm, driven the snowmobile over one of those high places, and it had landed on top of her. The medical examiner would tell us if she had been killed instantly or had been injured badly and, unable to move, had died there.

I studied the scene for a long time, snowshoeing around to imprint it on my mind from every angle, regretting that I had no camera, and then I remembered that Rona had had a camera with her and that we hadn't taken her effects the night before.

I found it by digging through the snow around Rona's snowmobile and uncovering a leather bag. Inside, I found a 35mm camera and several lenses along with extra film, filters, a folding tripod, her sunglasses, and other items.

I knew enough about cameras to attach the shortest-barrelled of the lenses to it and to puzzle out how it operated. The film counter showed that the camera was loaded, so I used the balance of the film to photograph what I had studied. Then I put the camera away and checked over the snowmobile. It wouldn't start, but aside from that it seemed to be in operating condition. I left it there.

Back in town, I dropped the camera and film off at Kinsey's photo studio. The only reason Kinsey existed in a town as small as Fox River was because he had a lucrative sideline in shooting advertising and publicity photos for the surrounding ski resorts, which gave him the capital to install the equipment to process his own work. I asked him to develop the film and call me when it was ready.

Julio was alone at the office.

"Where's Foster?" I asked.

"He took Haddon back to the house. Didn't you pass them on the way?"

I shook my head.

"Then I suppose he took Dylan Steele home first. Rona's brother is pretty shaken up. Maybe the three of them stopped at the hospital for the results of the postmortem. What did you find out?"

"Nothing," I said. "It was an accident. She waited too long, started back after the storm hit, couldn't see where she was going, and drove the snowmobile over the bank." I shook my head. "It surprises me

though. Rona could read the weather as well as anyone. She knew what those clouds meant. Why didn't she start back earlier?"

"Maybe she was too interested in what she was doing. Or maybe she didn't want to leave. She told me once it wasn't unusual to wait all day and shoot no film at all, yet every time she left she had the feeling she should have stayed five minutes longer."

I headed for the door. "I'll try the hospital. If I miss Foster, tell him what I said. I'll be at home, but don't call. I'll shower and shave and sleep for an hour, then I'll be back."

Foster and Haddon and Dylan Steele had already gone when I reached the hospital, so I talked to Blenheim, the doctor who acted for the coroner.

"How did she die?" I asked.

"Several broken cervical vertebrae," he said. "A broken neck to you."

"Not from internal injuries?"

"There were no obvious external signs. When I found her neck broken, I saw no point in going further." His eyes were blank. "What are you trying to say?"

"Nothing, I guess. We found her under the snowmobile so I expected her to be all broken up inside. She went off a sheer six-foot drop and more than three hundred pounds landed on her."

"She wasn't thrown clear?"

"Take my word for it. She was *under* the damned machine. I don't suppose there's any point in asking if you could determine the time of death."

"After the body was out in that weather?"

"That's what I thought. It doesn't matter. The storm started at about noon. It would have to be shortly afterward." I lifted a hand. "Goodbye, Doctor. I'll see you at the inquest."

I guess it was because I was tired, but it wasn't until I had taken a shower and stretched out on my bed and was hovering somewhere between wakefulness and sleep that I realized something was seriously wrong about the way Rona died.

I kept my alarm clock across the room so that it was necessary to get out of bed to turn it off. It was one of two methods I used to get on my feet and stay there when I hadn't had enough sleep. The second was to

sip a steaming mug of black coffee.

As the caffeine slowly brought me back to full alert, the thought came again that there was something odd in the way that Rona died.

As I had told Julio, she was weather-wise. Even if she hadn't been, the storm would have come as no surprise. There had been ample warning from the weather bureau. And she knew how to handle herself in bad weather. She would have been going slowly in that snowmobile, feeling her way, aware of the hazards and ready to leave the saddle if she had to.

I left the house and drove across town, stopping at Kinsey's laboratory.

"How did we make out?" I asked.

He grinned a little. "The first twelve are excellent, so you can't blame the processing. I can't say much for the last eight."

I opened the box, pulled out a plastic-mounted slide, and peered through it.

"Hey," I said. "Do you have a viewer?"

"Sure." Kinsey pushed one toward me. "Just put the slide in the slot and press down."

I skipped over the pictures I had taken, then concentrated on the others, all of which had been taken before the storm. I don't know a snow bunting from any other bird, but I know a deer and when I came across a slide that showed a big buck, his head held high and turned toward the telephoto lens, I stopped. There were three slides of the deer, the last showing him taking off as if he had been startled. I went back to the first one. He was a beauty and I hoped he was still around next hunting season.

I was studying the transparency when I saw a shape I couldn't quite make out.

"Do you have a projector?" I asked Kinsey.

"In the room I reserve for paying clients," he said. "Come on."

He took me into his office, dropped the blind, inserted the slide into a projector on a small table, and flicked a switch that turned off the room lights as it turned on the projector.

The buck leaped to life on the screen on the wall, more beautiful than in the smaller size, but I was no longer interested in him. The shape I had noticed was beyond him, further down the bank of the creek. I pointed it out to Kinsey. "Does that look like a man to you?"

- "What would a man be doing out there?"

"Is there anything you can do to make it clearer?"

"No. I can't put something in that isn't there to begin with. I can make an enlarged print of that area, black and white or color. Color takes longer. It might show something."

"How big?"

"As big as you want it, but beyond a certain point, you'll lose too much definition."

"Then make it in color and as big as your judgment tells you. Bring it to the office as soon as it's done."

Kinsey grinned. "I might work for free because you're a friend of mine, but don't expect me to *deliver*." His grin faded before the expression on my face. "Is something up?"

"There may be."

Foster was at the office, looking worse than I felt because he had had no sleep at all. He glared at me. "Are you through wandering around?"

"Yeah," I said. I went directly to my desk and dialed Dr. Blenheim. When he answered, I said, "I'd like you to examine the body again."

"I have already done so," he said. "You were right. The snowmobile did fall on her and I found several badly broken ribs. But as I told you, there were no external signs, probably due to the cushioning effect of the heavy clothing. However, there was also no internal bleeding, merely seepage, and the lividity was not consistent with my impression of the position of the body."

"Which means?"

"She was already dead when the snowmobile landed on her. The broken neck happened sometime before."

"How long?"

"It's impossible to tell."

"What caused the broken neck?"

"A sharp blow to the neck. Pressure. Take your choice."

"Write it up and I'll be over to get it," I said.

I hung up and leaned back. Foster's eyes were fixed on me.

"Is it a secret or do you let me in on it?" he asked.

I told him about my talk with Blenheim and about the slide at Kinsey's. "I think it shows a man out there. I think he killed her and then

drove the snowmobile over the bank to make it appear that she died in an accident."

His face was as blank as ever. "Who? Rona had no enemies."

"She was wealthy. Why don't we start with Riddle, the family lawyer, and ask him who inherits?"

His eyes were as cold as yesterday's wind. "Do you know what you're talking about?"

I shrugged. "Not really. But you're the boss. If you say let it drop, I'll let it drop."

He sat for a long moment, then reached for the phone and dialed.

When he hung up, he said, "Riddle wouldn't get too specific, but what it amounts to is that Rona had no control over her money. She lived on a monthly allowance, which I already knew. What I didn't know was that Dylan, not Riddle, was the administrator, and it stood like that until Rona had been married for one year. According to Riddle it was set up that way so that no one could marry her for her money. If she remained married for one year, control would pass to her, but if the marriage broke up or she died Dylan retained control."

"How did Haddon fit in?"

"If she died within the year, he'd inherit a fixed sum of one hundred thousand dollars. Of course, if the marriage didn't last he'd receive nothing."

"In that case, I think we had better talk to both of them. Mrs. Lithone told me Haddon was leaving Rona and returning to New York because he couldn't stand living here. With Rona dead, he goes back with a hundred thousand, far more than he ever made from his novels and exactly one hundred thousand more than he would receive if she was alive when he left her."

Foster reached for his coat. "I'll get Dylan," he said. "You bring in Haddon."

The four of us sat in the office.

Dylan Steele was a tall man, on the rangy side, the tweedy type with thick unruly black hair. Right now his eyes smouldered and his lips were pulled thin at the thought of our suspecting him of killing his sister.

Haddon sat in Julio's chair, his face a little drawn, and shadows

under his eyes. But then he hadn't had any sleep either.

Dylan was in the same boat as Haddon as far as an alibi was concerned. His office was in his home. His wife and children were sunning themselves in the Bahamas and, like Mrs. Lithone, their housekeeper had also been off.

Both had opportunity and motive, but the edge in capability went to Dylan. He had grown up here and knew how to handle himself in bad weather and the woods.

Maybe it was poor police procedure to question them together, but we didn't think so. Foster had the idea that whichever one it was, the other had to be our ally. The trouble was, each accused the other—Dylan vehemently and Haddon wearily.

"It had to be you," said Dylan. "The money—"

"I care nothing about money," said Haddon. "I lived without it before and I'll live without it again."

"You were the only one who knew where she was."

"That's a lie!" snapped Haddon. "You knew. You talked to her on the phone the night before. She told you about the snow buntings and that she'd be at the blind in the morning. You could have come up the valley from the other end and returned the same way. No one would have seen you."

Dylan glared at Foster. "If you think about it, your suspicion that I killed her to retain control of the money is ridiculous, since he was leaving her, and under the terms of the will I would remain administrator."

"You couldn't have known when, even if Mrs. Lithone told you I was thinking of leaving," said Haddon. "And if I didn't leave before the anniversary date, which is only a week away, you were finished."

"Your property adjoins Rona's," said Foster. "Everyone knows your father wanted each of you to have your own, so he split the original estate. It's easy enough to walk from your house to the blind."

"Only a fool would do it in winter," said Dylan.

"But it could be done."

Dylan sprang to his feet. "I don't have to listen to this."

"No, sir, you don't," said Foster. "You can leave. But please understand that this isn't the end of it. Someone killed her."

Dylan thrust an angry finger at Haddon. "He did!"

"We'll see," I said. "We intend to ask Riddle to conduct a complete

accounting of the estate your father left to see how much money Rona would have taken over if her marriage had lasted another week."

It seemed to me that Dylan grew a little pale. "That's an insult to my integrity!"

"No," I said. "It's a necessary step to determine how much of a motive you might have had."

Dylan slammed the door behind him.

Haddon slipped into his coat and smiled wryly. "It had to be him, you know. I didn't want her money. I just wanted her to be happy."

"But not enough to stay," I said.

There was a sudden pain in his eyes. "You don't understand. I couldn't work here. I haven't done a thing for a whole year and if I can't write, I'm nothing."

He closed the door quietly.

Foster asked, "Which one?"

"I vote for Dylan," I said. "But then Haddon could be a better actor than he is a writer. Or, I suppose, it could be neither."

Foster nodded. "There's always that possibility." He stood up and reached for his coat. "I wonder if it'll be possible to ever prove anything."

"We'll know more when we see Kinsey's enlargement," I said.

He nodded. "Sure." He said it absently, as if he really wasn't listening at all.

I cleared my throat.

"Foster, I know it's none of my business, but for a man who loved her, you're taking it very calmly. Damn it, if I were in your shoes, I'd be charging around, looking for revenge."

"Maybe I'm just tired," he said. "And maybe it's because she sort of died for me when she married Haddon. What happened out there couldn't hurt any worse than that."

"With Haddon gone, you might have gotten her back."

His voice lashed at me. "Don't you think that hasn't been eating at me ever since I found out?" Like a man half asleep, his feet dragging, he shuffled to the door and went out.

From the window, I saw him climb into his car and sit behind the wheel for a few minutes.

He drove away as Kinsey's small van pulled up and Kinsey came in and handed me a large envelope.

"This is the best I could do," he said. "You might get a little more if you send the slide to a lab with more sophisticated equipment."

I held the print under my desk lamp. Kinsey had enlarged the section in which the figure appeared. It was a man, all right, but as Kinsey had warned me the figure had been so small in the original the camera simply hadn't recorded enough detail.

The man appeared to be wearing a dun-colored coat and striding directly toward the camera, his face nothing more than a grey spot with two dark spots for the eyes.

And then my heart gave a little flip and I had no more questions about who killed Rona.

"Watch the office," I said to Kinsey. "Julio will be in shortly."

"Where the hell are you going?"

"To show this to Foster," I said.

I had parked the car and mounted the steps of the small house where Foster lived when I heard the gun go off.

My blood running cold, I slammed the door open and stumbled into Foster's living room. There was a fireplace on one wall. In the corner next to it, he had placed a small desk and he now slumped in the chair before it, the small gun he had killed himself with lying on the floor below his right hand. His head had fallen forward and rested on his left arm, which seemed to point toward the base of the desk lamp where a small envelope with my name on it leaned against the base.

All the note inside said was: *I couldn't live without her.*

I had always worried a little about Foster because I knew no man could build the wall he had and bury everything inside himself. The pressure builds and inevitably something comes along that can't be contained.

I returned the note to the envelope and carefully tucked it into my pocket.

Some of the town gossips would say he had done it because he loved her and she was dead, while others would argue that he had done it because if she had lived he might have won her back.

I would say nothing. Foster had been my friend and he had addressed the note to me deliberately. The message was not an excuse but an explanation only. I would understand because he knew I would be coming to see him.

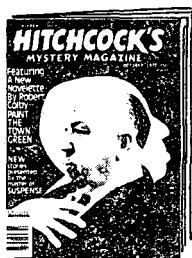
In the enlarged photo under my arm, that indefinite figure could have been the Abominable Snowman or Bigfoot for all the identification that it showed.

Except for one thing.

Above the shapeless face, in the center of the dark mass that could have been bushy hair, a hat, or a parka, there was a single bright spot as if something shiny had caught the light and reflected it strongly.

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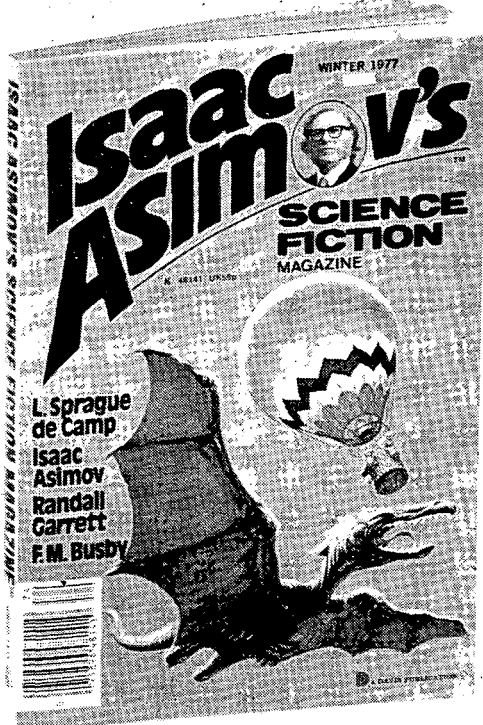
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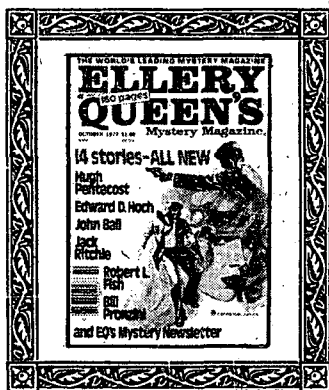
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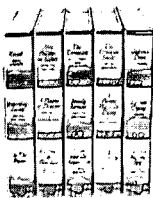
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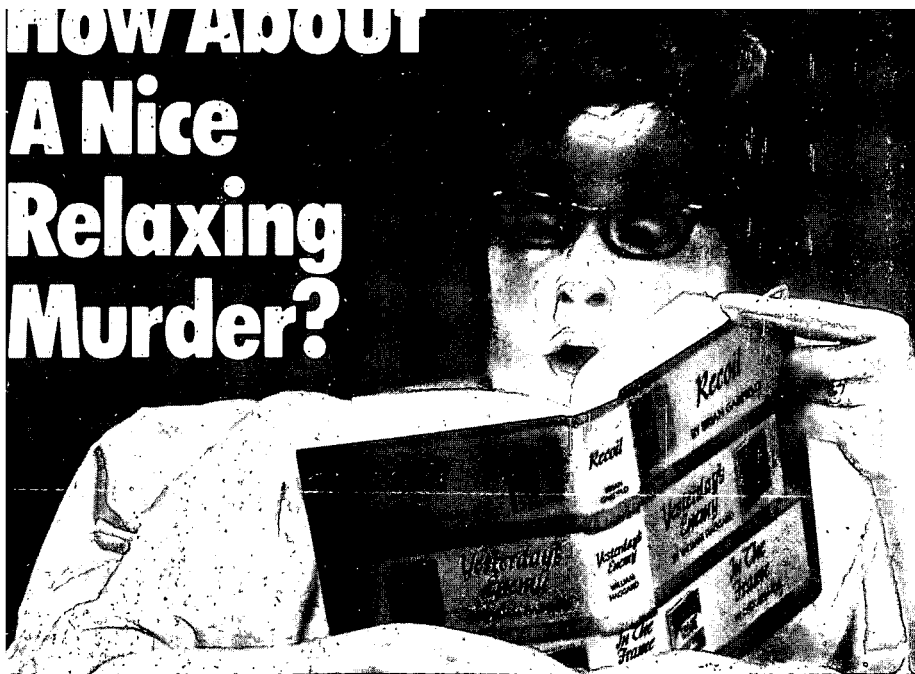
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